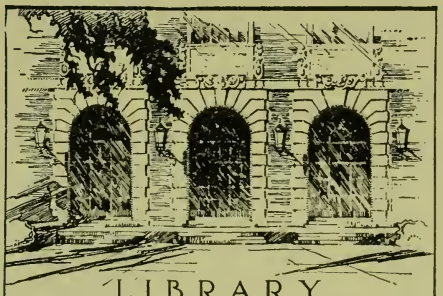
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AT SOCIETY'S EXPENSE

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF

'A MOORLAND IDYL,' 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own:
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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AT SOCIETY'S EXPENSE.

CHAPTER I.

COMEDIANS.

A SHRILL resonant laugh rose upon the October breeze as it swept the dusky knobs of gorse on Warren Common. The sound was quickly dispersed in the obscurity of the gathering twilight, for the wind was restless and came in noisier and more persistent gusts now that the sun had gone; but immediately thereafter two figures

arose from a little hollow amidst the furze, and came out roistering into the open. They were women, or more probably by behaviour girls, for they could only be dimly seen. They still laughed and talked in unreserved key.

'What if they do know you, Bee?' cried one, in response to something that the other had said in lower tone. 'They'll trust us all the more.'

'Will they? Why, they knew all about it when he turned me out, and they know that the old fellow won't stump up a farthing for any bill of mine——'

'Psss! If they won't, you'll have to go and see Gertie first, that's all, old girl.'

And the speaker laughed once more.

'I won't do that,' asserted the other, the quieter of the two, with some emphasis.

'You'll have to, Bee. You're not a sneak. It was a fair toss.'

Then they went on for a short space in silence, evidently in the direction of a small house which loomed from the open road-side not far off.

Approaching the smoky town of Aggthorpe by the high-road from the south-east, you crossed this piece of unenclosed heath-land, known to the district as Warren Common. An irregular, broken, picturesque bit of ground it was, some mile long by half as much in width, with a scattered hamlet on it, three open, converging highways across, bracken and gorse-clad hillocks upon its surface, and fringes of goodly trees around, which latter, however, reached their nobility of

stature in happier times, and every one of which now pathetically stretched one or more of its withered limbs to the poisonous breezes that, with triumphant scourge, swept the district surrounding this prosperous north-country centre.

It was October twilight now, but, being thus neighboured, even at a brighter hour Warren Common could, to the comparative observer, offer but a begrimed appearance. Here leaves at their birth were never green, the uncrumpling bracken never brown; how then the hawthorn-blossom white, or the fragrant gorse a flame of gold? The breath of prosperity had touched it, and these insignificant consequences had to be accepted with a few others of a somewhat more substantial nature.

The common, nevertheless, amongst the townspeople at hand, had maintained its reputation for being 'in the country,' both for residential and recreative purposes, hence it served the inhabitants of Aggthorpe much as a Hampstead Heath serves a larger and more highly civilized community elsewhere.

Amidst the fringing trees at the north end lay scattered a handful of noticeable residences, stone-built and well-seasoned, none less than a generation old—for the building speculator had not been able to effect a grip upon the eligible land hereabout—but all gazing anxiously westward, eyes and mouth agape to receive the latest suggestive, reassuring whiff from that reeking, but profitable, valley just in front. As well as these noteworthy abodes,

there was a sprinkling of cottages appertaining to the meaner sort, and in a far corner, by the side of one of the open high-roads already mentioned, even a public-house. But, as became the dignity of its neighbourhood, an inoffensive hostelry now, mainly famous for innocent tea-parties in the summer, retaining much of its old rural aspect externally, and within wholly purged from its former notoriety as the resort of common thieves and highwaymen.

It was towards this house that the two young women moved. From the low, old-fashioned bow-window at the side of the doorway came the flickering light of a fire burning inside, for the blind remained up. The inn stood back some twenty paces from the road, the intervening

rectangular space of grass being walled in and divided by a stone pavement leading from a wicket gate up to the door. Against the side walls within the enclosure were permanent benches, convenient for summer festivities. The sign-board over the door was not now visible in any detail, it simply becoming a small patch of greater darkness on the dark house-side ; but both visitors well knew the dim portrayal that its surface boasted, intended to perpetuate for the behoof of a sceptical posterity the contours of that renowned beast of agricultural tradition, ' The Craven Heifer.'

The more jubilant of the travellers walked up with ready pace to the inn door and raised the latch. The sound re-echoed through the silent house, as did also the steps and voices of the

girls as they went forward into that firelit room.

'Come, Bee, this will do!' cried that irrepressible one, as she crouched over the fender and rubbed her hands close to the bars. 'I'm just about ready for tea, aren't you, old girl? Don't——'

There was a footstep in the stone passage, so the girl checked herself and rose to her full height. A woman entered, and peered at them in the firelight.

'Will you let us have some tea, please?'

The speaker's tongue had suddenly assumed quite an unexpected tinge of accentual refinement, which, together with the tall, dignified figure she presented standing in the dim light with her back to the fire, impressed the hostess deeply, as

no doubt it was intended to do. A respectful acquiescence was instantly forthcoming, and solicitous inquiry as to individual needs.

'Cold ham? Yes. Fresh eggs gathered just before sunset. Would do excellently.' All should be ready with speed, and the lamp alight in an instant.

No sooner had the step of the landlady died away than the taller girl, she who had acted as leader in the undertaking, seized her lighter companion by the waist and whirled her round several times in boisterous abandonment, until both at length tumbled on the floor.

When the lamp was brought in there was unbroken calm in the room. One of the girls, sitting in a Windsor arm-chair, with her feet towards the fire, was screened

by an open newspaper which she seemed to be reading: the other, the irrepressible, stood in pensive mood upon the hearth-stone with her hands behind her back, but she at once aroused herself, and conversed affably with the hostess as the latter spread the cloth.

In this brief colloquy the young lady's presence there was plausibly accounted for, and the widow inn-keeper, though by no means the dullest-witted of the sisterhood, felt fully content in her small piece of professional good fortune. In the stronger light which the lamp afforded, she glanced now and then at the frank, handsome features of her visitor with womanly interest; nor at the countenance alone, for the thin, white hand which hung gracefully forward, with its jewelled fingers

playing in and out of the long silk glove which dangled from it, was not to be slighted.

The silent girl was effectually overshadowed by the engaging mien of her more complaisant companion. As the conversation between the other two proceeded, she had thrown away the newspaper which had been screening her, but nevertheless she showed no inclination to come forward into the glare of familiar contact. Rubbing her hands with the gesture of one under the touch of cold, she crouched over the fire until the landlady had left the room. Then she was aroused from her attitude of humility by a fillip upon the ear from the glove dangling from those tapering fingers above her head.

'Up, Bee, and show your sting!' cried

the tall girl, vivaciously. 'Let us improve the shining hour. Get to the ham. I'll pour out, for I'm the youngest by about ten years,—or is it fifteen?'

The other seemed to pout as she went to her place at the table, but was twitted into a laugh. Whilst she bent over the table, her lighter-hearted companion drew the cosy off the tea-pot, picking it up lightly by the top between finger and thumb, and placed it upon her own head with theatrical gesture, letting it rest there like an episcopal mitre, whilst she said, with no irreverence,

> 'Some hae meat, and canna eat,
> And some wad eat that want it;
> But we hae meat and we can eat,
> And sae the Lord be thanket.'

Then the meal commenced.

As the girls sat with the lamp between

them, eating without speech, and it must be admitted with somewhat indelicate voracity, their features were for the first time clearly distinguishable, and the contrasted individualities forcibly presented. The one pronounced by her companion to be the elder,—she who had been content, if not indeed anxious, to accept the second place in all proceedings within the lamplight,—judging by her appearance, seemed but to obey the injunction impressed upon her by the creative fates. Subordination was the suggestion of each natural attribute. She shall serve her brethren, —sisters eke and circumstances,—was the inflexible decree with which the gates of benign nothingness had been some twenty-seven years ago barred behind her. The time between then and now had been

but one prolonged insistence upon this original edict by all whom it in the remotest degree affected,—with but small consciousness of the fact, perhaps, on the part of the principal subject of it, but not without visible effect upon the more material tissue submitted to its influence. There were but scant traces of refinement left about this girl, either in mould or behaviour.

'Take up the joint, Bee,' exclaimed her more delicate companion through her teeth, after a fierce glance at the animal methods of the famished girl beside her. 'What is the good of a knife and fork?'

This angry facetiousness was received in silence, and had no apparent influence on the methods it was deprecating. Bee devoured on, oblivious of all else in the

universe beyond the immediate comforts of this present meal. It was, no doubt, this purely animal engagement which brought so prominently forward the animal traits of her countenance. She had not removed her hat, but had thrust it upwards a little, so that the heaviness of the forehead was visible, and something of the carelessly kept, hay-coloured hair. A pair of gaudy ear-rings played restlessly about the strong jaw curves during their constant exertions.

To all this her companion offered a striking contrast. Her present situation and jaunty behaviour scarcely suggested genuine breeding, but there was none the less a measure of native refinement about all she did, which would have gone far towards the conciliation of even a fastidi-

ous observer. There was a winning grace in feature and movement, kept constantly alive by a restless vivacity, which perhaps precluded a too critical scrutiny of the actual depth beneath.

This girl had flung away her hat upon entering, and thus displayed a wealth of dark hair, coiled by artful negligence in 'sweet disorder,' showing no approach to the too precise art which is deprecated by the poet. Upon taking her seat at the table, too, she had unfastened the short cloak which she wore, and, allowing it to fall back, had disclosed more clearly the softly waving contours of the perfected woman's form. It was high spring-time for her in body and soul, and perhaps occasionally in her glance she betrayed a consciousness of this rose-bud season. But

this did not detract. Intense life glowed through every attribute of her beauty,—active, aggressive life; the meekness of 'a violet by a mossy stone' suspected in none. No subjection whether to brethren, sisters, or circumstances was apparent in her mien or expression. A calm, nay, defiant consciousness of inexhaustible resource and self-confidence beamed from her sanguine temperament.

Mere physical requirements were much more rapidly appeased in this girl than in her more sensual companion. It was not unlikely that the other's unreserved display of her inordinate needs served as a positive check upon the legitimate indulgence of the more intellectual one. It constrained her, no doubt, to disclaim impatiently such small measure as she had

in common with these animal propensities, to decline to give way to them by the sacrifice of one jot of her self-conscious dignity. Having recognized this, she rose from the table and stood looking into the fire with one foot upon the iron rim of the fender. After biting her lip for some time with irrepressible vexation, she burst into merry laughter, and turned round with an accession of tolerance visible in her features.

'Aren't you ready to go, Bee?' she asked, superciliously. The other was cracking a second or third egg.

'I don't think I shall go,' was the response.

'How do you propose to pay for this meal, then?'

'Give 'em your ring—' the speaker's mouth was full as she spoke, and the

hearer turned away. But in a moment she refaced the table, and whilst doing so had withdrawn one of the rings from her hand. She then held it out, suspended on the tip of her little finger.

'Look here, Bee,' she said, with calmly set features. 'This ring is worth twelve or fifteen pounds; this tea, how much? Two shillings each, I suppose. I will give them the ring for it, and will receive no change, mind that. But remember until you die in that ditch which is digging for you, that—that—what you are.'

Therewith the girl took up her hat from a side-table, and, failing a mirror, pinned it to her hair before a large framed print of a former local master of the hounds. Then the other leaped up, and set her back firmly against the door.

'I'll go, Helen; I will really,' she said, submissively.

'Let me pass.'

'You shan't pass. You shan't give them your ring. I'm going now this minute. Go and sit down.'

The stately girl still waved her antagonist away, but the latter stood immovable. She began to whimper.

'You can't take a bit of fun. I always meant to go. When we tossed up who should go, I meant to abide by it. Darling Helen, do sit down,' she continued in tears, stepping forward to caress her companion, who, however, eluded her touch. 'Let me go. I'll jump straight into the canal if you—you—give 'em your ring.'

Without a word, Helen turned on her heel and retreated to the fire.

'You—you won't do it? You'll promise not to give it?'

'I'll do nothing until you come back.'

'Put it on again. Let me see you put it on.'

The ring was accordingly replaced and peace restored. Helen withdrew towards the fireplace, pulled up a chair and sat there in silence. The other hurriedly straightened her hat and garments, noticeably of poorer quality and less attractive cut than her friend's, and after exacting one more reassurance she stole noiselessly from the inn.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

The wind still swept the heath, and all light had faded. As Beatrice stepped on to the road, she heard the loud argumentative voices and shuffling footsteps of a company of colliers approaching, on their way no doubt to the town for Saturday night's marketing and other social purposes, and in order to avoid them she crossed quickly to the expanse of soft turf which she had to traverse. The confused

vernacular died away, and only the restless wind remained.

At some distance, through the gathering darkness, numerous lights showed where the town lay, but it was not towards them that the young woman walked. When some shrill whistle from the trains came to her on the wind, she glanced that way, but without any slackening of her pace. Then by chance her eyes would be lifted to the clear deep sky, cloudless now and starlit, and she would see a meteor shoot across the northern zenith, which startled and checked her. She stood still to look, and in a few seconds she saw another and another. Unaccustomed to natural observations, this greatly alarmed her, and she thought tremulously of thunderbolts and cataclysms. She paused in her purpose;

but being of no temperament to meet the last day in heroic solitude, she presently hastened forward over the short, thick turf.

The gorse bushes gave her many a fright, but at length she reached without accident that end of the heath where the larger residences clustered. She peered at one obscure building after another around which the trees were swaying and creaking, and before one which appeared larger than the rest, with high railings enclosing a plot of land in front of it, she stood, and from the gate she surveyed its roof and numerous chimneys which stood out against the sky. Whilst standing there, a couple of musical bells chimed out three-quarters from the clock in the stable turret hard by, and the clear

notes, as they were tossed away by the wind, thrilled this particular listener with particular acuteness. In one or two of the upper windows lights appeared, and Beatrice speculated upon them. But presently, mustering all her courage, she entered the gateway, and slinking under the shade of large shrubs, which skirted the close-cut turf, she came to the side of the house.

The girl's movements in the darkness evinced complete familiarity with the place and its appointments. With one supreme effort she ran to the back of the house and rang the bell. The sound resulting from her action again alarmed her, with such apparent force did it break the silence brooding over the mansion. The young woman's familiarity with the pre-

sumable movements within, added no doubt largely to her sense of nervousness. If *he* were in the house,—but a maid opened the door, a perfect stranger to the visitor.

'Is Miss Crossley at home?'

The answer was in the affirmative, but modified to the extent that she could not then see anybody.

'Is she at dinner?' asked the suppliant, with undisguised solicitude.

'Yes,—well, she's just going in. If you'll give me your name, I can tell her afterwards and you can come again in the morning.'

'But she is not *at* the table? Do go and ask her to see me. She will come—'

The maid had scrutinized the eager features closely throughout the colloquy,

and seemed now to draw a conclusion. The other perceived it, but the urgency of the case overpowered all wish for concealment.

'Is it Miss Crossley's sister?' asked the housemaid.

'Tell her secretly,' urged the other, in indirect reply. 'Tell her it is Beatrice. Don't let uncle or anybody else know—please.'

Upon this, the maid undertook the commission with interest and alacrity, and bade the visitor enter. With much misgiving Beatrice consented to stand just within the door, but could not be persuaded to enter a room. With another survey, which bespoke how much of antecedent back-stair gossip and speculation, the maid-servant withdrew.

It chanced that the lady spoken of as Miss Crossley was at that moment in the drawing-room with a young gentleman alone. A general message was brought to her there.

'Who is it, Gertrude?' asked the gentleman, who was reclining in evening-dress upon a couch with one foot aloft resting upon a raised knee. 'One of your pensioners?'

'Probably.'

'Here, wait a minute: I feel generous to-night.' Whilst the young lady stood smiling, the speaker took a dainty little purse from his waistcoat-pocket, and balancing a bright sovereign upon one of his fingers held it towards her without altering his position. 'Give her that.'

Miss Crossley took it with 'Thank you,

Philip,' and left the room. In the hall the maid gave the name which had been entrusted to her, and noticed the expression upon her young mistress's features, for construction and consideration afterwards no doubt. She was instructed where to bring the visitor, and she withdrew.

Miss Crossley entered the room she had indicated, and there, with no discernible display of feeling of any kind, awaited the interview. Her face, well-formed enough as most women's are, without any particular degree of beauty about it, was of a singularly colourless hue, the effect of which was heightened by the black, evidently mourning, gown which she was wearing. Despite time and situation, her neck and arms were covered with what

might be thought a 'needless degree of scrupulosity;' but it could speedily be seen that this arose from no desire to screen any deficiencies of mould. All the graceful charm, all the inspiriting and poetic suggestion which for aspiring man dwells in the divine subtleties of the maiden's form, was here. Nor was it nature's work alone. To the natural gifts had been imparted the lustre of conscious art, and Miss Gertrude Crossley walked a very elegant creation indeed.

A sorry contrast this shamefaced sister which now entered to her. Beatrice gave one glance at her calm and dignified hostess, and then, two paces within the room, stood with eyes downcast. The other approached her kindly.

'You have been a long time coming,

Beatrice,'—taking one of the cold red hands in her own warm white ones.

There was no reply to this, only a mute questioning look. Gertrude arched her comely neck and imprinted a sisterly kiss upon the florid cheek before her. It was strictly a kiss of consanguinity, and even by a casual beholder could not have been mistaken for anything else; but a kiss it was, and as such by the visitor accepted. She, at any rate, was not capable of refining any subtle distinctions in ostensible displays of affection. To her it was what it seemed,—wholly, painfully unexpected, without a doubt, but all the sweeter for that. Without comparing garments or complexion, she let her cold hands meet at the back of the soft warm neck and returned the kiss with extravagant interest.

The graceful frame shivered beneath the touch, and the grasp was quickly relaxed. But a glad smile upon the features which had looked so coarse just now, precluded all suggestion of a misinterpretation of the movement.

'My hands are so cold, Gertie, and you are so warm.'

'Yes, of course. Sit down. Come up to the fire.'

'Why have you been so long in coming? Have you not heard before?' said Gertrude, regarding her sister seated.

The other looked puzzled, but of a sudden noticed the mourning-gown.

'What! . . . Not . . . Is uncle——'

'He died more than a month ago. You didn't know it?'

The announcement smote the visitor

dumb, and she stared with glistening eyes at the flame in the grate. A cold, scrutinizing glance was shot upon her from above, a glance too plainly bespeaking the suspicion and distrust which prompted it; but Beatrice could not see it.

'If you did not know about it, Beatrice, what made you come here to-night?'

The calm severity of the question could not escape even the unstrung ear of such as Beatrice this time. She looked up quickly.

'I came to beg from you, for I had no money to pay for a meal.'

Gertrude unlaced her fingers and moved her eyes. The dinner-bell rang, and thereupon the visitor arose.

'Stay a minute,' said the hostess, eagerly. 'I have so wanted to know about you

—what you were doing. Have you no fixed place? No kind of employment?' The speaker experienced a shudder as she screwed up courage to put this alarming question, and, having done so, hastened to modify it. 'No respectable kind of employment?'

The other hung down her head as she muttered,

'I had until this morning;—at least—I had—you wouldn't think it respectable, but it was all I could get.'

Gertrude looked at her silently, but more mildly. Positive query, in the face of this, she dared not put.

'We have been with a country company,' began Beatrice, volubly, as if to vanquish her nervousness. 'It was Talbot's in "The Distressed Sinner." Really,

Gertrude,' continued the suppliant, with a whimper, 'it was not a—not a very low company. But we've not been paid for a week, and this morning they were sold up at Wallborough, or else I'd never have come to shame you. Indeed, I wouldn't.'

'Don't say that, Beatrice,' replied the other, magnanimously and more mildly before her sister's emotion. 'It doesn't shame *me*. It is only you I think of, your welfare and happiness. It is dreadful to think of you in such surroundings.'

'It is all I am fit for, Gertie; you know it is all I am fit for.'

There was something pathetic in the sincere vehemency of self-abasement,—abasement of a ring painfully genuine, and which did not re-echo the most distant reservation of exceptional self-righte-

ousness. The poor girl's whole aspect clamoured in confirmation of the truth and justness of her assertion. But her sister's hand waved it all away in gracious benediction, or perchance affrighted deprecation.

'Oh, Beatrice, Beatrice!' she said. 'That all depends upon ourselves, you know. If we seek strength in the right quarter, we shall find it. Don't you believe this?' added the young lady, in response to a movement of her sister's.

'I have sought it in every quarter, but it never comes. I am no stronger or better now than I was when uncle turned me out of doors.'

The tact of Beatrice pitifully failed her, or else she was more aggressively independent than her previous aspect gave

hint of. So horror-stricken was Gertrude that she drew back in silence for an instant, then renewed,—

'I have thought of you all this time repenting—' she spoke in undisguised sorrow,—'working your way patiently to a respectable position again. Oh, it is dreadful! Will—will you go into a Home?'

With characteristic obtuseness the visitor hastily misconstrued the question,—interpreting it, no doubt, by the flash of instinct which would have illumined the situation had positions been reversed. The face of Beatrice was lightened.

'With you, Gertie!' she cried. 'Oh, yes, it would save me. I would do all the work. Will you have a large house? You won't——'

The look on the other's face checked her, and Beatrice doubtless perceived her error.

'I didn't mean that,' faltered Gertrude, at length; 'not at first, at least. Of course in time we might do anything. Have you kept the pledge ever since you signed it?'

'No, I haven't,' asserted Beatrice, with some bitterness. 'Oh, Gertie, you don't know what it is to live with hardly enough to eat! I can't keep the pledge. I shan't take it again, for it only makes me feel a—a liar. I couldn't live without some——'

'Hsh—sh!' shrieked Gertrude, screening her ears with the white palms of her hands, and turning to the fire.

'Will you give me anything?' asked

Beatrice, after a brief silence, with a stronger note of independence in her utterance. 'I won't trouble you again. I'll starve rather.'

'*I* daren't give you money when I know what will become of it,' replied the hostess, vehemently, still facing the fire. 'Oh, Beatrice, I am dying to help you, but I dare not give you money. Do think of what your life will lead you to! If I give you money, I shall only help you to get deeper, and the sin will be mine. Do think of what I say!'

'Will you give me nothing to pay for a meal with?' asked Beatrice, blankly.

'*I* dare not; but take this. It is from another, not from me——'

'Is it from Barnard?' cried the other, with unprecedented fierceness.

'No, it is not.'

Thereupon the suppliant, without farther inquiry, took the sovereign from the outstretched hand, and moved towards the door.

'But, Beatrice, do think again. Won't you go into a comfortable Home where you will——'

'I *will* think of it.'

'And you will write to me?'

There was no immediate response.

'You think me unkind and cruel, I know,' continued Gertrude, in a tone of injured resignation; 'but I only think of your welfare. I would give all the money I have, if I could do you any good, any real good, by it. Surely you know I would? Will you write to me soon about it? Don't wander about with—with such

people. Oh, Beatrice, promise me that!'

'I must do something to live——'

'Yes, of course; but, if you don't like a Home, I will get you some—some employment.'

'Situation,' interrupted Beatrice, as it seemed, not without sarcasm.

'—some respectable employment. You would be so much happier.'

'I will see,' rejoined the elder, her nail upon the well-milled coin, doubtless regulating the degree of evasiveness in her tone.

The desire of Beatrice no longer to delay her sister's dinner being obvious, Gertrude, with much genuine reluctance and consequently unaccustomed awkwardness, ushered the visitor from the room, and herself accompanied her to the back-door.

The October wind swept in with a disconsolate sough, and the luxuries of Grove House were again closed to the (presumably) impenitent's gaze.

The 'Good night; let me hear very soon,' with which she had been dismissed, still played in her ears as she hurried away beneath the stars. She had given it no answer,—not exactly in anger or resentment, but mere bewildering indifference. It was some moments before she could collect herself sufficiently to formulate any definite sensation for or against her sister's behaviour towards her. For very much from this casual expedition she had certainly not looked. Perhaps unearned benefits were not sufficiently abundant in the daily experiences of Beatrice to lead

her to build largely upon the chances of any such.

In the meantime, Gertrude returned with hasty step to the drawing-room, and apologised with some solicitude to the young gentleman still recumbent there. He immediately arose, touched his collar and the bottom rim of his waistcoat, and with ripples of facetious comment upon the topic of philanthropy in general, passed into the dining-room with his hand lightly upon the lady's shoulder.

At table they two were alone, attended by a maid: between the courses the latter withdrew. A noticeable reserve held Gertrude, which for a time was played upon by a careless pleasantry in Philip. A faultless, moustachioed young man this,

upon whom the superficial cynicism of extreme well-being sat with a certain attractive effect. There was an air of mild deprecation in his companion, but obviously the banter was not irksome to her. During a brief silence Philip's features reflected tickling thoughts, flowing rapidly on to audible laughter. Gertrude looked up.

'Poor Barnard,' explained the other, lightly; 'how mad the *Moon* will make him! Can't you see him reading the article, Gert? I believe the old man foresaw it. Gave Pildacre an advance copy of his will, perhaps, for the purpose. Why! don't you think so?'

'Oh, Philip, you are too shocking!'

'I can't make up my mind,' Philip continued, pausing with a piece of bread be-

tween his fingers. 'Give me your advice again, Gertrude. Renounce the competition and embrace pauperdom; or——?'

'It is not for me to advise. A man worthy of the name——'

'Ha! I see,' interrupted he, with laughter. 'But perhaps it is worth a sacrifice of principle. The old man was shrewd enough to depend upon that. If I withdraw, Barnard simply walks in. I can hardly watch that with complacency. For our private satisfaction we ought to put him on his trial. Don't you think so?'

'I have full faith in your honour, Philip.'

'Thank you, Gertrude. But I am afraid our ethical codes differ.'

And there was another silence.

'Do you ever hear of Beatrice?' asked Philip presently, when they were again alone.

Gertrude jumped. Why *should* he have put this question at this particular moment? She stammered, 'Sometimes.'

'I consider father's treatment of her simply dastardly,' the gentleman went on, with more seriousness than he had yet displayed. 'Not to leave her sixpence, when it was wholly through himself that she came to grief! Yes, Gertrude, I assert it was, wholly. What *is* she doing?'

This had been hitherto a screened topic between them, and the sudden rending of the veil disconcerted the young lady.

'I would rather not speak of it,' she said, in a tone not to be mistaken.

'I beg your pardon,'—and he shrugged his shoulders airily.

Philip, not long at issue with the moral currents, reverted to his bantering vein, and all went pleasantly as before.

Meanwhile, Beatrice, gripping tightly the donation of her unknown benefactor, was hastening across the heath with the satisfaction ofimmediate requirements; any suggestion of a critical outlook upon the general world which may have dawned within her was at once removed, and she rose superior to the trammels of a comparative discontent. This was the compensating strain in the ignoble phase of the young woman's development. She had so much in common with the poet's mouse that the present only touched her; from

the forward and the backward glance incident to a more advanced organization she was wholly free.

The gorse bushes now failed to startle her, and the meteors which the autumn wind seemed to be scattering from time to time across the sky she no longer saw. Her eyes travelled to the lesser lights,—the material lights of that infinitesimal fraction of the universe,—and in such her poor dwarf soul found its fit stimulus and support. Some degree of exhilaration even enlivened her,—the effects of the meal, doubtless, were able to assert themselves unhindered. She was half whistling a tune when the walls of the 'Craven Heifer' again loomed before her.

Naturally engaged in thoughts of bursting triumphantly in upon her friend Helen, it

could not escape the notice of Beatrice that the window of the room in which she had left her companion was not as she had last seen it. All the front of the house was dark; no light, even the faintest, through the blinds of that window behind which, surely, Helen must be. Her heart misgave her. Had the other played her false? Broken the promises which she had exacted from her? Well she knew of her peculiarity of temperament; well she knew——

Hastening noisily through the doorway, and on to the parlour where they had regaled themselves, she found it dark and unoccupied. Only the last gleeds of the fire dying in the grate. It could only be a trick, surely. The landlady's steps were in the passage, and Beatrice turned to-

wards the woman who came on with a candle.

'Your friend bade me tell you as she'd gone on,' was the curt greeting from the landlady.

Beatrice easily perceived the difference of aspect in her.

'Didn't she pay?' she gasped.

'Ay, ay, she paid right enough. The gentleman paid, at any rate,' added the woman, with a sarcasm.

The honest wonderment of the other was so palpable that the woman softened.

'You know all about it now?'

'I don't, Mrs. Whitak——'

The wide expansion of the other's features had apparently checked Beatrice; then suffused her whole face with a blush of extraordinary depth.

'You, Miss Crossley, i' the company o' such like! E-eh, my!'

Beatrice instantly defied the insinuation, and launched into a zealous and indignant defence of her comely companion. The obvious sincerity of it, if not wholly convincing to the landlady's more mature judgment of human affairs, at any rate allayed her resentment, and she was without difficulty led to a detailed narration of the course things had taken during the absence of Beatrice.

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CHAPTER III.

FATE IN THE CUP.

When alone in the inn parlour, Helen had cast a kindly glance upon the table which she had left prematurely, with some inward prompting, perhaps, to supplement now in privacy the inadequate repast which her pride had only been able to allow her. If it were so, she quickly vanquished the ignoble temptation, and, turning from the more substantial allurements, she contented herself with an additional

cup of tea. She placed her cup at the edge of the table, and sat with her crossed feet extended towards the fender.

It was difficult to gather from Helen's mere situation and appearance any clue to the inner recesses of her individual world. Accepted lines failed when applied to the elucidation of this personality. At one moment she might have been accepted as an accredited priestess of the conventional ritual: at another not without difficulty even as a person of mediocre respectability. Reflectively, and in something of a masculine seated posture, she stirred her tea, her elbow resting upon the edge of the table. A black stalk floating on the circulating surface caught her eye, and as she took it on the tip of the spoon she smiled.

'A stranger, we used to call them,' she mused, with reference to the days of childhood. 'What was it we used to say?'

The fancy broke her reverie, and she playfully placed the fragment of tea-stalk upon the delicately-veined back of her left hand, then smiting upon it with the back of her right, said aloud, for each word a blow,

> '"Saturday, Sunday, Monday,
> Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,
> Satur——"'

The medium of augury fell to her lap, and she reflected. 'Why, it *is* Saturday!' she exclaimed aloud; and with a laugh added, 'With a full purse my stranger come, or not at all.'

Helen then picked up the newspaper

from the floor, where Beatrice had thrown it. She glanced at the title, *The Aggthorpe Moon*, then to the columns. Type and paper bespoke the inferior species of the provincial press. It actually tore as the reader opened it, and as Helen reflected, for peculiar reasons, upon this fact, her eye caught words which quickly banished all other considerations from her mind. At once she gathered herself together, folded the paper into a form to be conveniently held, and read with every indication of absorption and surprise. This is what she read:

'THE WILL AND BENEFACTIONS OF THE LATE MR. THOMAS PAINE GOLDHAWKE, J.P.

'As promised to our readers a week or two ago, we are now able to give a more

adequate abstract of the somewhat remarkable will of the late Mr. Goldhawke, of this town, than at that time appeared. The will was made on the 17th of November last year, and Mr. Goldhawke died at his residence on Warren Common on the 3rd of September last, and the will was proved on the 3rd of the present month. The amount is declared to be £394,968 2*s.* 4*d.* gross, and £394,914 17*s.* 10*d.* nett.

'The deceased appoints his two sons, Barnard Goldhawke, corn-factor and miller, of this town, and Philip Goldhawke, of the Inner Temple, barrister-at-law, as trustees and executors of that his will.

'He directs as follows: "That my body shall be interred in the churchyard of Eastley Parish Church, and I desire that

all matters in connection with my funeral be as plain as possible. And I direct that my trustees or trustee shall expend such sums not exceeding £300 and £200 respectively: as to the said sum of £300, in placing two stained-glass windows in the church of S. Wilfred's, Aggthorpe, one to be in memory of my late wife and the other in memory of myself; and as to the said sum of £200, in placing one or more stained-glass windows in the said parish church of Eastley. And I also direct my trustees or trustee to expend a sum not exceeding £100 in the erection of two granite crosses, one to be placed on the grave of my late wife at the said church of S. Wilfred's, and the other on my own grave at the said church of Eastley. I direct that my niece, Ger-

trude Crossley, who has proved herself such a trustworthy and judicious housekeeper to me for several years past, select such articles as she may think proper (not exceeding in the whole the value of £1,000) out of my gold watches, jewellery, trinkets, books, furniture, pictures, articles of vertu, silver, and silver-plated goods, etc. Also I bequeath to the said Gertrude Crossley, and direct to be paid to her as soon after death as possible, free of legacy duty, the sum of £10,000."

'The testator, in addition, bequeaths the sum of £150 to the said Gertrude Crossley to distribute amongst the poor of Eastley, Warren Common, and neighbourhood, at her discretion entirely.

'With regard to the whole of the rest and residue of his estate, the testator

bequeaths it to his two executors in the following noteworthy manner: "To hold the said residue and the various securities in which it may for the time being be invested wholly upon trust for such one of my said sons and executors as shall, within twelve months from the day of my death, prove to the satisfaction of William Elliott Strangeways of Aggthorpe aforesaid, solicitor, that he is joined in lawful matrimony, according to the rites of the Church of England, to a lady not exceeding the age of 25 years, possessed absolutely of a capital sum in real or personal property, or both, exceeding in amount that possessed by such lady (if any) as shall be in pursuance of and in accordance with this proviso lawfully married to the other of my said sons and executors;

and should any difference or differences arise in such adjudication, with regard to valuation of securities or otherwise, the decision of the said William Elliott Strangeways in any such case shall be final and conclusive. Upon further trust, in case neither of my said sons shall by the time and in manner aforesaid, to the satisfaction of the said William Elliott Strangeways as aforesaid, have married, to transfer the whole of the said residue and the securities, etc., to the trustees for the time being of the Aggthorpe Industrial and Fine Art Institution, to be held by them for such purposes in such manner and upon such conditions as are expressed and declared by a Deed Poll under my hand and seal bearing date, etc., and to be lodged immediately upon my

decease in the hands of the Worshipful the Mayor for the time being of the said borough of Aggthorpe." '

Such was the article in which Helen found so profound an interest, and it perhaps warranted her concluding exclamation of 'Well!' Her lips and eyebrows had played continually throughout the whole time of its perusal, and, now that she had finished it, she laid the paper in her lap and beamed with an overflow of irrepressible enjoyment. Having briefly indulged the mood reflected in her features, she again took up the paper, and, presumably prompted by some definite mental suggestion, traced its columns at a glance. In an instant her eyes were again alight, and she read eagerly. More prominent

type this, and the vein professedly editorial. Helen read:

'The will of Mr. Goldhawke, our late well-known townsman, which in another column we have given in some detail, affords solid pabulum for the ruminating observer of these days. At the time of the gentleman's demise, we threw a casual glance in this direction, but delicacy forbade our *then* scrutinizing personalities too closely. Advisedly we reserved the few remarks which duty calls upon us to make until this time, when,—so rapidly alas! do the waves of current life rush past us,—our deceased townsman may, without affectation or offence, be said to belong to the public history of this borough.

'To the most casual observer it must be plain how the trend towards socialism

is powerfully accelerated by such a will as this of Mr. Goldhawke's. Our line upon this topic is sufficiently known to our numerous readers. When, since the institution of this journal, did we in season or out of season refrain from snatching a moral to adorn a tale? Never; with confidential challenge we assert it. Nor shall we do so in this flagrant, and withal pregnant, instance.

'We court not personalities, nay, we do our utmost to avoid any appearance of such; but our clear duty lies before us. Mr. Thomas Paine Goldhawke was well known to this borough, his enterprise and his eccentricities alike. A proletariat of the proletariat, baptized in the name of a prophet, who could foresee that such extremity of ignominy could be awaiting

him? Originally a second-hand sack merchant, then successively and in combination corn-factor, flour-miller, and maltster, advanced wholly by individual cunning and enterprise, what a glorious opportunity was before him! But the yawning depths of this absolutely tragical *omission* we have no present intention of sounding, we shall return to it again; let us glance merely at that which has actually been *committed*.

'Our definition of property is well known to all, and we need not here restate it. How has Mr. Goldhawke conformed to it? He has accumulated, by legal means certainly, and as a result of his own individual enterprise, what without exaggeration we may call enormous wealth, and how has his acquisition been justified? How has he acquitted himself

in his stewardship? Alas, the answer is too obvious. This man has imagined his possessions his own, and has, in ungarbled parlance, juggled with them, gambled with them from the dark and narrow limits of his coffin with the sole purpose of indulging a morbid and misanthropic craving. In his lifetime, beneficence was unknown to him, in his death it is unsuspected. His reply to the appeal for help in a noble public undertaking not many years ago, is only too well remembered: "I only contribute to the extension and maintenance of jails and lunatic asylums." Such was this man throughout life, so is he in death. Duly weigh it, readers, and the scandalous iniquity it involves.

'The spectacle of a very large fortune accumulated in a single lifetime, the pos-

sessor of which has made no provision in his will for the return of any part of it to the people, by whom alone he has made his wealth, naturally sets us thinking. Unfortunately we have not yet come to put a price on the head of a millionaire, as was of yore put upon the head of a wolf, but this ultimate goal already looms upon the horizon. Millionaires may be temporarily allowed to exist; but they must justify their existence by proving that they are capable of doing things for the public, which the public cannot do for itself; hence the wise millionaire will pay liberal ransom not only during his life, but also at his death. These men forget that they are but stewards entrusted with the administration of their wealth for the benefit of mankind.

'Made no provision, we say. But the ultimate trust? it may be objected. Anger us not, kind reader. Is this provision? This consummate sarcasm of an unprincipled cynic. How he grins over in his quiet grave yonder! Industrial and Fine Art Institutions, will *you* benefit? Will sons magnanimously decline the competitive chase of gilded women that they may promote *your* interests? Do you think it? Did *he* think it? Too well we know the magnanimity of the testator. His sole object was to sow dissension by his lifeless fingers, as he had persistently done by them living. His domestic quarrels are notorious; he was unwilling in his grave to forego them. He has endeavoured to intensify the hatred of his children towards himself; to implant irrevocable dis-

cord between them; and to invite the contempt and the execration of all mankind. In our opinion he has admirably effected his object, and we solicit a universal commination over his ashes and his memory.'

'Amen, amen!' cried Helen, aloud through her laughter when she had finished the perusal of this notable provincial leader. 'But poor old Bee! Not a cent. The mean scoundrel!'

This wholly unlooked-for discovery of the death of Beatrice's uncle, and consequent testamentary curiosities, afforded Helen ample matter for reflection. Her thoughts did not follow the current indicated by the editor of the *Aggthorpe Moon*, who, it may be here mentioned, was none other than this young lady's own father; but they took a wholly in-

dependent channel more accordant to the sex and disposition of the reader. She could not fail to follow her friend Beatrice on her errand, and speculate upon her reception.

Helen knew nothing of the Goldhawke household beyond what rumour and talk with Beatrice had afforded her. From these premisses, she found it impossible to foresee what the attitude of Miss Gertrude Crossley might be. She grew really curious about it. Her glance flitted to and from the paper before her. She grew impatient for her companion's return. Above all she longed to exchange words with somebody about it, and with whom more profitably than with Beatrice, who would be able positively to add to the information. It seemed so long since she

had left her; was she going to stay there with her sister altogether? That would imply petty treachery to herself here at the inn, therefore the suggestion was instantly rejected. Whatever her ultimate arrangements, Beatrice would unquestionably return hither to liberate Helen from her dilemma. Their parting skirmish had at any rate secured that.

How long Helen remained in this state of eager expectancy she could not have determined; it seemed a very long time to her. At length a footstep was audible on the pavement without, a hurried footstep, such as betokened with certainty the arrival of the expected one. Helen jumped up, and stood just within the doorway. The outer door was opened, and the newcomer came forward into the inn. But

unfortunately it was a man,—as was immediately obvious, a gentleman.

'Have two young ladies called here recently?' he exclaimed, with what appeared needless impetuosity as he burst into the room.

Helen turned around and retreated towards the fireplace.

'Yes, and have just had tea,' she replied, with her back towards him.

'They have! Have they gone into Aggthorpe, or are they——' he checked himself, stepped forward, and gazed at her side-face. Then she returned the look.

'It is you,' was his complacent comment; and in response to Helen's dignified reserve he added, 'Pray pardon the intrusion.'

Then he fell back a pace or two, as

though to recover his composure, and there was a brief silence.

'You must forgive my pursuing you like this,' the gentleman re-commenced, with light pleasantry. 'I could not resist the impulse. As soon as I heard of the disaster, I hastened to find you. I have come on horseback.'

'Indeed!' returned the other, and at the moment, without any preliminary announcement, the landlady entered.

Helen glared at her indignantly, but only said,

'Let me have your bill, please.'

'Two shillings each, miss,' replied the woman, moving the cups and plates to the tray.

With consummate assurance, Helen placed her hand to her pocket and produced

a purse which to her certain knowledge contained one well-worn farthing, kept there 'for luck.' But her instinct did not deceive her. The farthing discharged her liabilities as it had often done before. Before the purse had been opened, the gentleman stepped courteously forward, and with 'Allow me, Miss Ilderton,' placed the money upon the table. The young lady remonstrated, ultimately inclined her fair head graciously, and put back her purse.

The hostess left the room with a trayful of things.

'May I accompany you into Aggthorpe?' asked Helen's obliging acquaintance.

Enlightened by an unexpected flash of thought, she acquiesced and thanked him. He left to have his horse stabled, and she gave the necessary message for the aban-

doned Beatrice. In a few minutes the pair departed from the inn in company.

Full half an hour more elapsed ere Beatrice returned. To find Helen gone, and as it seemed in the company of a gentleman, inspired her with the extremity of surprise. The furthest detail that she could extract from the now favourably disposed hostess failed to afford her the slightest glimmer of enlightenment, so that she was needs content to await the interposition of events themselves. The converse of Beatrice with the landlady of the 'Craven Heifer' seemed to arouse some possibility of friendly communion between them, and the former, being now left unreservedly to her own devices, and by no means embarrassed by a multiplicity of beckoning harbours for her tired craft, was without

difficulty persuaded to strike sail in this first 'quiet rode' so unexpectedly offered her. Speedily Beatrice was installed in the snug seclusion of the Saturday-night kitchen, a more favourable specimen of which no north-country housewife could boast than could Mrs. Whitaker of the 'Craven Heifer,' Warren Common. Here under the grateful encouragement of warmth of various qualities, a well-milled coin in her purse, and, tell it not to the young lady at dinner yonder, a tumbler on the hob, Beatrice found herself capable of expanding to a degree that she had long ago considered extinct in her. To her tales Mrs. Whitaker attended with matronly interest and criticism.

CHAPTER IV.

KNIGHT-ERRANTRY.

'It was unkind of you, Miss Ilderton, to deny me the pleasure of doing a small service for you,' said Helen's visitor for the second time, as the two walked leisurely across the heath, townwards.

'But if the service was not acceptable to me, it is surely easily explained,' was the light rejoinder.

'You know that I refuse to accept that as an explanation,' said the gentleman, with the utmost good humour. 'You

don't think that I should wish to buy you, surely. Do you think because you should put me under an obligation that I should take a base advantage of it, and attempt to impose conditions on you. Naturally you cannot know much of me, seeing that our acquaintance has been so superficial and of but a few days' duration. I can only ask you to take my word for it.'

Helen laughed.

'Your experience doesn't urge you to accept a man's word in such a connection?'

'Perhaps not. Moreover, is it customary to receive substantial benefits from a casual acquaintance when there can be no opportunity of returning them in any manner whatsoever?'

'I had perhaps hoped that we had got beyond the casualty.'

Helen did not reply to this, and it was some seconds before the other resumed.

'You told me that you had not been long with that travelling company. Was that your first experience of the stage?'

'It was.'

'And do your experiences satisfy you, may I ask?' enquired he, with a laugh.

'Oh, quite, quite.'

He tried to scan her face in the obscurity.

'At any rate, they have the charm of variety.'

'Which your former experiences had not, I presume?'

'Not exactly. I was a governess in genteel families.'

'I discerned at least that you were not a native of the circle in which I found you. You will not return to that kind of thing?'

'I certainly know of nothing to persuade me to the contrary.'

'Impossible, impossible! As a freak it is intelligible, but I will not believe that you have any inclination to be buried in such ignominy.'

There was much earnestness in his tone, and Helen did not make fun of it.

'Let us get out of the way of these people,' he added, impulsively, turning away over the short soft turf of the common.

A group of noisy marketers came along the road behind them. Helen followed him without demur.

'You can't pretend, Miss Ilderton, that you prefer that kind of life?'

'On the whole, I don't think I can: but none the less my inclinations are by no means towards what you would call respectability.'

'What *I* would call! Naturally you think I stickle for conventional definitions, but you are mistaken. Does this action of mine suggest it? At any rate, your inclinations can't be towards anything savouring of baseness; and all removed from——'

'Baseness, like respectability, is but a comparative term.'

'How comparative?' he retorted.

'Differs according to different views of life. What *is* positive, beyond a brick or —an empty purse?'

She laughed.

'Very much, I hope. So you are a sceptic, are you? If you come to that, I see no more certainty in a brick than in a moral axiom. To my dense perception the solidity of worthy action is as firmly established as that of a brick, or even an empty purse. If you are sceptical on one point, surely you are equally sceptical upon the other. The world can have no real existence about you.'

Helen laughed again.

'But you are a lawyer, you see,' she said. 'That makes things seem very positive to you.'

'Then let us abandon comparative terms. Is personal comfort fairly positive?'

'Moderately so, but I am by no means

scrupulously fastidious about it myself. My personal comfort is inextricably involved in intellectual satisfaction. Material comfort cannot exist for me without the other.'

Her companion gathered some slight satisfaction from this reply, however deficient in his own particular strain of ethics.

'I am glad of that,' he said. 'May I without presumption ask how you propose to adjust these two requirements in Aggthorpe to-night?'

'Oh, yes. I have friends there. Intimate friends whom I have known all my life. I shall stay for a few days with them.'

'Certainly. Is it too impudent to ask if

you will let me know by letter when you go from there and your plans.'

'I can have no objection,' was Helen's light reply.

'You will, really?' exclaimed the other, betraying in his tone the surprise which her acquiescence caused him.

'I will, since you are kind enough to trouble about me.'

The man felt an acute thrill of pleasure, and replied with some fervour.

'I do trouble about you, Miss Ilderton, as, if you ever feel disposed to put my interest to the test, you will speedily discover. With that promise the object of my pursuit is effected, but you will allow me to accompany you into the town.'

'Thank you; for some part of the way, at any rate.'

Therewith they turned again towards the high-road and walked very briskly forward.

After about a quarter-of-an-hour's walking, past scattered houses, blighted trees and hedgerows, and tumbled-down walls, lamp-lights began, and by their light, and by that from an occasional shop, long dreary rows of new brick houses became visible, giving indications of prosperous suburban extensions from a manufacturing centre. With a view, perhaps, to warding off the more personal topics to which the conversation constantly tended, Helen here indulged in cynical criticism of the evidences of progress which surrounded them,—criticism necessarily somewhat tinged by the temporary colour imparted to her vision by her father's leading ar-

ticle recently perused. But, independently, the young lady displayed an imagination of considerable native refinement, and, judging by his responses, even her present companion seemed to gather gratification from her remarks.

At length they reached paved streetways, and passengers became more numerous. Huge factory buildings loomed upon all hands, and the atmosphere was becoming more redolent of unmistakable prosperity, when Helen stopped beneath a lamp-post growing from the top of a low wall. She leaned with her elbows upon the wall and looked over. The lights were reflected in a mass of moving blackness below, from which arose :

> ' Cocytus' breath,
> And all the poisons of the Stygian pool.'

Helen smiled sarcastically, and pointed at the gurgling flow of the semi-liquid pollution, known to geographers and others as the River Cloaker. At the farther extremity of the bridge stood one of Goldhawke's flour-mills, sending forth incessantly, Saturday night though it was, the restless din of its champing machinery. Added to it was the fume and howl of Goldhawke's iron-foundry, standing by the river bank some short way farther down, whilst scattered in near propinquity were grease-works, glass-bottle factories, mungo and shoddy mills, breweries, and numerous other such indicia of the prosperity and well-being of the town of Aggthorpe.

'Here we will part,' said Helen at last. 'It is a fitting spot. Good-bye, Mr. Secroft.'

Offering further thanks, the young lady extended her hand.

'You will remember your promise?' said the other, taking the proffered hand and holding it.

'Certainly.'

And they parted.

As this young lawyer from Wallborough retraced his steps leisurely towards the 'Craven Heifer' on Warren Common, he had the first opportunity of calmly reflecting upon the course he had been pursuing. This interview with Helen had by no means diminished the power of her fascination over him. Clement Secroft was looked upon by his more matter-of-fact acquaintance as of just a shadow too strict a habit for complete sociability amongst

an easy-going circle; it would therefore have caused no little surprise and amusement, to his less rigid censors, if it could have been generally known to them that his sensibility had led him into this degree of intercourse with a member of the dramatic company whose summary dispersal was just now the main source of their conversational entertainment. Clement himself, even now in the greater clearness of his vision, saw no cloud of conscientious alarm on the horizon, but he did venture calmly to question the wisdom of the conduct into which a mere generous impulse had been able to lead him. Of this would-be actress he knew positively nothing; of the conventional presumption to which her position would inevitably give rise he could not profess ignorance. That he was

proceeding warily and honourably, however, he quickly assured himself, and from that gathered a sufficiency of immediate satisfaction. He returned briskly to the inn, in getting his horse underwent the scrutiny of the curious Beatrice, and rode away for Wallborough, a distance of some eighteen miles from Warren Common.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE 'MOON.'

HELEN, in the meantime, crossed the bridge at which she had dismissed her cavalier, and entered the town of Aggthorpe. The pavements of the broad street, illumined by the glare of a continuous series of shop-windows, displayed the customary Saturday night throng of the locality. The girl seemed to glance critically about her as she threaded her way amongst the eager populace, and she received many inquiring

glances in return. General hubbub pervaded the lower atmosphere, absorbing enough to eye and ear levelled to the horizontal, but if by chance the face was raised to the expanse between the house-tops, this restless turmoil assumed more fitting proportions beneath the silent glance of those higher 'sleepless ministers' advancing so composedly. Helen did obtain such glance, and something certainly of such suggestion; but, whilst she appropriated much of the application as regarded the scene around her, very little of that was hers which pertained to the scene above.

Not for long did this mood of abstraction continue. Before proceeding far along the street a cry reached the ears of Helen, which, despite the reference to the eter-

nities which it involved, brought her very closely to the less significant concerns of her own more familiar planet.

'*Moon! Moon!*' rang in shrillest of prolonged accents above the general din. 'Fourth edition! Ree-markable will of a townsman! Fullest details!'

'Ay, it's owd Gowdhawke's,' she heard from the lips of a passenger. 'A rum un an' all. Has-tur seen it, Liza?'

Helen heard the negative, the consequent persuasion from the original speaker, and saw with satisfaction the copper produced. This 'fourth edition' exhilarated her, and it spurred her to more speedy progress. As she ascended the street, many similar cries greeted her, so that when she reached a small stationer's shop with a dark, arched court beside it, over

the window of which by the lamplight could be read, 'Pildacre, Bookseller, etc.,' and on the window-panes, '*Moon* Office,' she felt in boisterous spirits. By the window of this shop she stood, and peered through the collection of cheap works, stationery, and nick-nacks which was presented to the public gaze, endeavouring to get a glimpse of the shop within. She moved at times to enlarge the range of her inspection, and at length seemed satisfied. Then she entered.

An elderly woman was seated knitting behind the counter, and she raised her spectacled features as the door opened, then rose expectantly as the customer advanced. Helen drew near with some facetious inquiry, but was checked by her mother's instant exclamation.

'Why, Nelly!'

'Fourth edition, mother!' returned the other, warding off any more expansive greeting.

'Fourth edition, my child;' and the mother's face glowed in an instant.

'Did we begin with a second or third?'

'With a first, my child! A first! A first of a thousand, and three more of five hundred each! But, Nelly——'

'Patience, mother. We will indulge in greetings presently. I must see father under this intoxicating visitation. He is at the press, I suppose?'

'He is, my child: working himself to death, what with toil and excitement. We have only got Jesse Oldroyd with us now,' added the good woman, with an audible sigh; 'and it is too much for them.'

Ere the last sentence was completed, Helen had left the shop, and her mother's eyes rested wistfully upon the spot whence the girl had disappeared. Mrs. Pildacre sighed again, then sank upon her chair, and again still lower—vanishing into those depths, so mysterious and fascinating to the mind of imaginative childhood, the inside of a tradesman's counter. There was the soft report of a cork removed, a gurgle, and in a moment the journalist's wife again occupied her chair, with a white handkerchief to her lips.

Helen turned up the dark entry beside the shop-window, and, after proceeding some paces, stopped before a dark door. Up above, a strong light shot from the window, illuminating a patch of the high brick wall opposite, and displaying there

the shadow of a figure in constant movement. A regular thudding sound issued from the building, and appeared to shake the whole structure to the very foundation. The girl only lingered a few seconds, then opened the door, and, finding all still dark within, paused. From her familiarity with the place, she knew that a flight of stairs was immediately before her; but she extended her hand to assure herself of the fact. In doing so, she could perceive a ray of light shooting from the chink round the door at the head of the stairs; then, closing the door by which she had entered, she ascended. The woodwork trembled beneath the incessant thuds of the machinery at work, and, above, Helen paused again. She could distinctly hear a voice raised within.

'New plant, wholly new plant, Jesse, affording clearer type and an enlarged page: that is what we want, that is what we shall have. My life begins, Jesse: what fields are open to me! Didn't I tell you?'

Some reply was made, but the distance of the speaker from the door precluded his words from being audible.

'Every farthing to-night, Jesse,' came in the former voice. 'Every farthing you shall receive. You have saved me, Jesse, and you know me for no——'

The door opened suddenly, and the speaker stopped. At the next instant a pair of arms, naked to the elbow, and black for the greater part of that distance, were flung into the air, and a wild 'Hurrah!' rose above the din of the

working-room. The man clasped his daughter in his arms, and his eyes were tear-bound.

'Helen!' he cried, ecstatically. 'Oh, Helen! You see my triumph. We—we are on the fifth!'

The girl showed no inclination to shirk his embraces, despite ink and perspiration.

'You come opportunely, my girl,' continued the printer, in a broken voice; 'I can kill the fatted calf other than in hy-hyperbole. I am meditating a removal, or an enlargement of existing premises, Helen.' The man ended by shouting at full voice, for he had returned to his frame. 'But we will talk of it. Now my triumph is complete, absolutely complete.'

And the man of emotion looked for an instant, with enthusiastic tenderness, upon the face of his daughter.

This proprietor, editor, and printer of the *Aggthorpe Moon* seemed a man of well-preserved middle-age. His head in great part bald; his face, thin and eager, fringed with a spare, grey beard. Upon the crest of his bald forehead appeared two circular black daubs, one above each temple, which gave him an odd and somewhat supernatural appearance in his present state of excitement. The explanation of these two marks was soon afforded, for from time to time as he worked, when presumably overpowered by the intensity of reflection upon the vast horizon suddenly laid bare before him, he placed the tip of the thumb and second finger of his right hand upon

his brow, finding, by length of habit, exactly the same spot each time.

There was about this man none of the listless, mechanical abandonment so painfully conspicuous in the ordinary, present-day slaves of a machine. Nor did the ignoble interest in the few rascal counters which his toil represented by any means explain the difference. Whatever the faults of Nahum Pildacre, and he confessed to several, the misinterpretation of the relative value of counters was not one of them. The man at least had a soul above pelf—above yours and mine, it is true, every bit as much as above his own, if we were foolish enough to give him the opportunity of displaying it. He had a more or less clear view of a horizon other than that bounded by the narrow limits

of his printing-house yard. Look at him closely, and you saw this in his eye. His was not the conscious eye of sordid limitation. Call it anything but that. Theoretical, sanguine, delusive, at times even frenzied, eye, if you will; but at any rate a spiritual one. If he missed his golden crown, it would be from over-shooting the glittering points of it, not from raking amidst the muck in which his feet were planted.

Helen was conscious of a definite thrill of exhilaration as she gazed at her father. However vaguely in the matter of direction, she caught his spirit of artistic enthusiasm in the abstract, and felt elate she knew not why. From this she felt a need of action, and, pulling her gloves from her delicate fingers, she fell upon

the heap of copies flung from the press and proceeded to fold them. Her father approved with a yell of encouragement, and so the work went on.

It was an eight-page paper, one sheet of which Pildacre himself manipulated, the other his henchman. These Helen combined and folded down the centre. Throughout the day, the piles had been carried to the shop for distribution, the division of labour not being otherwise compassable; but now, with this additional pair of hands, Helen herself suggested a re-arrangement. She accordingly fled to communicate it to her mother, who, for the rest of the evening, referred boys applying for copies to the doorway up the yard. Here Helen sup-

plied their needs, and things proceeded merrily.

Although demand for the papers had, apparently, for some time ceased, it was nearly ten o'clock before Pildacre could be persuaded to forego the dazzling prospect of yet a sixth edition. With visible disappointment, he was at length constrained to wipe his brow, and view the small heap of papers which lingered on his hands.

'Nevertheless, it is a triumph,' he remarked, musingly, with his finger-tips upon his bald forehead. 'Don't you think it is a triumph, Helen, my girl? Don't you, Jesse, my man?'

Both onlookers afforded, in unmistakable tone, the assurance expected from them, and Nahum beamed before them.

'It *is* a triumph,' he continued, reflectively. 'An opinion of the gravest moment has, this day, been attended to by one—two—by several thousands of intelligent citizens, (more or less,) and it is beyond the bounds of the most common probability that every seed should have fallen upon barren ground. It cannot have done so, I say. Helen, I have a future.'

'I believe it, father.'

And each regarded the other complacently.

The proprietor continued in his sanguine vein, whilst he and his attendant were tidying the work-room preparatory to departure for the night. Vast journalistic enterprise, of a desperately didactic kind, was formulated in ejaculatory out-

line, casually involving in the project the outlay of capital of no niggardly proportions. Helen heard and watched her father with considerable curiosity; assenting unreservedly to every one of his numerous appeals to her, and perhaps really feeling a dawn of a suspicion that this poor father, whom, in the exuberance of her maidenhood, she had perceived to be little better than a lunatic, was, after all, one of the down-trodden great ones of the universe. The man Jesse, as he went about his occupation, was content with a continuous shrug of the shoulders.

At length the trio withdrew from the workshop, secured it for the night, and went to a side-door lower down the yard which gave private entrance to the journalist's domestic sanctities. To Helen's

surprise, in the dark passage within, her father grasped her shoulder and placed her against the wall,—he had done the same, with the other hand, by his long-suffering assistant,—and whispered hurriedly, 'One moment—strict silence.' With stealthy movement, Pildacre passed on tip-toe over the worn-out matting, not seen but heard, and mentally followed by the other two. A door opened with suddenness, lamplight flashed along the passage, the man's shadow in it, and all again was dark. The two for some moments heard no more.

Having closed the door behind him, Pildacre was instantly in the shop. Three strides brought him to the side of the woman, still sitting behind the counter;

and she, opening her eyes suddenly, stared at him in bewilderment. To one in supreme command of all faculties, Nahum must at that moment have presented a disconcerting spectacle. His brows were knit beneath that bald expanse, flanked by the two great black daubs above either temple, and his eyes flashed between enthusiasm and alarm. As he thrust such features eagerly forward to his wife's face, she could be excused her little display of inevitable discomfiture.

'Drunk again, my wife!' came in a desperate whisper from the printer.

'Oh, no, Nahum! the merest——'

But the man recoiled from the breath which had assailed him.

'Away instantly and get the supper . . . Leave that,' he added, in a changed voice of thunder.

The woman whined, and endeavoured to avoid him.

'Leave that, I say, Theodosia!'

And Nahum seized the bottle from her embraces. Therewith the startled housewife fled from his presence.

The journalist instantly plunged into the secrets of the counter, but finding nothing, he went impulsively to the street door. Across the pavement was the grate of a sewer, and over it were passionately flung the contents of the bottle. He returned to his shop, hastily brought forth the shutters, and was in a few minutes again with his family.

'On account, my good Jesse,' said Nahum after supper, as he bade his workman an affectionate farewell at the door. 'On account. Good-night, and the powers under all and every of their appellations bless you eternally.'

CHAPTER VI.

BEATRICE.

The enterprise of the editor of the *Aggthorpe Moon* was duly appreciated by the public appealed to. Ever since the death of the well-known townsman, Mr. Thomas Paine Goldhawke, (and indeed for long before it,) speculation had been rife upon the statistical curiosities which the event was to reveal, and for once nobody was found curmudgeon enough to reproach the deceased with being a source of disappoint-

ment to his neighbours. Popular rumour had, of course, placed the possible total very much nearer to the fascinating seven figures which hold such marvellous sway over the imagination of a commercial community; but the testator's individual methods of bequest speedily extinguished any incipient grumbling that this may have given rise to. No reasonable burgess affected to feel his town disgraced by such a record as that of £394,914 17*s.* 10*d.*

Mr. Goldhawke was a self-made man, but it was not by any means his past history only which had aroused especial interest in his personal affairs. Such social curiosities were not sufficiently uncommon in a manufacturing community to excite extraordinary comments in themselves. It was little that, in shaded byways of

the town as well as in the echoing corridors of the palatial workhouse, sundry ripe and hoary paupers might still be heard retailing scraps of prehistoric experience, which made plain to any unprejudiced listener, that he, the individual narrator, and this renowned deceased of the money-bags, had been very much nearer than brothers as they issued together in those earliest dawns of more than half-a-century ago from the self-same alley in their oily mechanical smocks. Any mill-hand of their number might go and do likewise, if he felt so determined. What did engage the higher curiosities of Aggthorpe was, that, in the midst of an aggressively independent population, Mr. Goldhawke was deemed of the eccentric. In an earnest mind like that of Mr.

Nahum Pildacre, the especial form of his eccentricity excited, as will readily be imagined, the extremity of indignation; but to neighbours of less pronounced convictions it became simply an amusing scene in the human comedy being enacted about them.

Although of humble social extraction, the Goldhawke family was not without noteworthy record amongst its own people. The father of this wealthy deceased was a mill overlooker of aggressive views in his day, and the baptismal name of his son kept alive his defiance of the law and society which had persecuted him. Jeremiah Goldhawke was a world's martyr in his way, having suffered (amongst other conflicts with authority) prosecution, and consequent statutory pains and penalties,

for corrupting the subject by offering for sale copies of the heretical 'Rights of Man.' He had thereupon married, with the sole purpose of obtaining a son who might in name at least carry down to another generation a desperate man's protest against a tyrannical policy. Jeremiah himself, it may be mentioned, was in his turn the son of an exceptionally enthusiastic methodist of the original school. From this stock, under later nineteenth century influences, the nearer subject of our consideration had in spite of his name drifted through chartist radicalism to cynical individualism and greed of the most senseless and pernicious order.

The only daughter of the defiant Jeremiah that had lived to maturity married a small watchmaker, named Stephen Cross-

ley, a man who, although of considerable mechanical ingenuity, had never been able to raise himself above the turbid current of back street pot-house, owing partly, it was reported, to an insuperable proclivity to the waters circulating in those quarters, and most partly, as it was oftentimes hinted, to his exercising his ingenuity, (by written contract,) upon the mechanical appliances of his capitalist brother-in-law only. Of Mrs. Crossley, who died early, little was known or remembered, beyond the fact that when Stephen succumbed to the proclivities aforesaid, she had left two girls, at a helpless age, of the names of Beatrice and Gertrude respectively.

The wife of the prosperous capitalist, (she then still lived,) befriended these

girls secretly, and thus they received a decent education and upbringing. It was, however, not until his own wife died, and he found, what he himself at least considered, the peculative dispositions of hireling domestics, that Mr. Thomas Paine Goldhawke recollected the existence of his two nieces. In parsimonious desperation he sought them out, and found them, to his amazement, to be two very presentable young ladies of nineteen and seventeen years of age respectively. Somewhat to the surprise of them both, this enigmatical uncle, whom they had long grown to regard as an awe-inspiring stranger merely, suddenly invited Beatrice, the elder, to pay a visit to his mansion, and gave Gertrude, the younger, to understand that he intended to take her further

education under his peculiar care, with a view to her efficient equipment for such course in life as her position seemed inevitably to point out.

To the majestic gloom of the house on Warren Common, Beatrice Crossley accordingly came trembling, and to her still further surprise was within three months ensuing installed in the responsible dignity of housekeeper to her august uncle. She had apparently given satisfaction, then, to an exacting host, and, by dint of a nervous solicitude to retain the favour which she had so unexpectedly been able to acquire, for two years things went to all appearance well.

This uncle's own family consisted of two sons, only one of which made his father's house a residence. At the time

of the arrival of Beatrice, this son the elder, by name Barnard, was a phlegmatic young man of twenty-two, thus three years her senior, already deeply versed in the mysteries of capital and speculation, and perhaps, in consequence of too great a similarity of temperament, an object of some jealous suspicion to his father. The two, nevertheless, worked well together, and their affairs prospered in their joint hands. The younger son Philip, at that time eighteen, had just proceeded to Oxford to resume his studies, being by wholly unmercantile temperament apparently marked out for the legal profession. From that time forth he was seldom at home.

Old Goldhawke, nearing seventy, and perceiving so many traits in his son Bar-

nard resembling those strongest in himself, wholly overlooked others of a more generous, or more definitely human tendency. If any thought of sentimental tendencies, for instance, in his son had at any time occurred to him, they had doubtless been speedily grinned away. So utterly extinct was even the most commonplace imagination in this frozen old capitalist. It was with nothing short of amazement, therefore, that one evening, returning home after the dinner-hour, when he had announced it previously as his intention to be absent for the night, and entering the drawing-room with (as some thought, premeditated) suddenness, he found his judicious niece and housekeeper reclining complacently in the arms of his phlegmatic son, with decanters and

half-full wine-glasses upon a little table beside them.

'I beg your pardon,' the old gentleman ejaculated, with cynical composure, and politely withdrew.

The next morning, as father and son drove to business, the former looked up from his newspaper.

'Thinking of marriage, then, Barnard,' he calmly observed.

'Oh, dear, no!' exclaimed the other, colouring in spite of himself. 'What should make you think so?'

'Well, last evening——'

'I was only making a fool of myself,' interposed the son. 'I have no thought of marrying.'

'You were making a fool of yourself.'

And there the matter ended.

As between father and son, at any rate; not exactly so as regarded the horrified young housekeeper. It could hardly be expected that one of so simple an organization as she should understand another who happened to be constituted on lines of quite abnormal complexity. Beatrice, for some reason, had to confess to herself the next morning that her recollection of the compromising incident was of the vaguest. From the very consciousness of this uncertainty sprang her shame. She was well aware that this was not the first instance of confused recollection in her recent experiences, and, awakening to the significance of it, she wept bitterly over the conviction. Beatrice did know, though, that the previous evening her uncle had detected her in some situation which could

not be otherwise than displeasing to him, and she consequently looked for his displeasure. This only showed how little knowledge of her uncle the two years' intercourse had been able to afford her. Looked-for methods were not such as Mr. Goldhawke ordinarily adopted.

One month succeeded to another, and still no sort of reference had been made to the occurrence. Barnard, it is true, had secretly cracked jokes upon it, but the reception of such jokes by his cousin had not encouraged him to a repetition of his facetiousness. Such fright had the incident occasioned the young lady, (for she had heard of the proclivities and fate of her father,) that she was in no danger of speedily courting that mental condition with which her sinister experience was in-

separably connected. Mr. Goldhawke and his son noted that Beatrice no longer allowed herself even the modest allowance of wine that custom permits a lady at the dinner-table. Barnard only smiled good-humouredly at what he considered the feminine extravagance of virtue; but Goldhawke senior saw in it cause for characteristic suspicion of evil. He watched his housekeeper very narrowly.

Beatrice encountered the casual surprises to which she was subjected with praiseworthy calmness, and even the heartless old cynic began to fear that the expected comedy was about to escape him. Even he felt it impossible to revive the matter now on the score of the old count alone. Some new delinquency was on the face of it indispensable.

Four months had elapsed, and a very marked change for the better was beginning to be perceptible in the bearing and appearance of Beatrice. A more pronounced degree of womanly sensibility and refinement shone through her daily action, and this not unnaturally enhanced such modest measure of physical attractiveness as had been given to her. Barnard again became partial to her society, but his cousin received his notice with bashfulness and restraint. The man really meant the girl no evil, and how should his thoughtless exuberance of well-being guess at the circumstances of a less equably constructed organism? During this period of struggle of the spiritual womanhood for supremacy over the more heavy-armed forces, it was no rare occurrence for Beatrice to be tossed

to her hardly-earned hours of repose over a stormy sea of tears, lashed by such winds of anguish as only assail the more delicately constituted barks.

The month of July came, and Mr. Goldhawke found that he had occasion for a course of the Buxton waters. If Beatrice for a moment suspected the expedition, her fears were dispelled, for proof became positive that her uncle had in reality gone there. For some days things went as usual. Barnard was busy elsewhere, and passed little time at home, to his cousin's infinite satisfaction. She found employment in such varied womanly interests as she was doing her utmost conscientiously to cultivate, and in such share of social intercourse as her uncle's misanthropic habits had enabled her to attain to.

It was the fifth day after her uncle's departure, in the evening nearing the dinner-hour, that Beatrice was walking about the grass-plot gazing at the various flowers which were displayed there. The western sun, still high, smote with power the close-shaven grass and the fragrant bloom around, and there was the lazy call of a rook sailing through the upper air. The dirty brown haze which hung over the town, and intercepted the promising glories of the horizon, wrought no depression in Beatrice's mind, for she had never known the heavens under any other aspect. She was not aware that the sun had power to fling for himself over those hills and valleys of the west a down of any different hue and texture from this manufactured medium. Whilst holding a pink poppy

between her fingers, and gazing absently into its depth, she was disturbed by a soft step upon the grass behind her.

'Sentimental, Beatrice?' asked Barnard, jocularly.

'I have waited for you, as you said you should come. Dinner is ready, I think, as soon as you are.'

'Very good.' And he ran off with a shrug of the shoulders.

At the dinner-table Barnard was unusually complaisant. He gave Beatrice all the town's news; towards the third course cracked mild jokes. He partook liberally of the wine, and pressed the decanters continually upon the attention of his companion. As usual, she systematically declined.

'There is a temperance meeting at the

Institute, I believe, to-morrow, Beatrice, —converts to the pledge are especially invited. Signatures will be taken with the collection afterwards. You had better go.'

The young lady smiled, but uneasily.

'Won't you?'

'I think not, thank you. I hope there is no necessity.'

Beatrice blushed crimson as she said it.

'Oh, I don't mean to insult you by insinuation. Don't go as a volunteer necessarily, but in some other capacity.'

Barnard was too jovial to construe the delicate hints of mere silent expression, although the features of Beatrice were offering many. She tried to smile, to keep her colour, to command her quivering lips, but with poor success.

'Why not address the meeting? You might even give your experiences, ha! ha!'

Beatrice gave no answer.

'Won't you, Beaty? Mrs. Crowther is getting it up. I'll give her a word.'

Beatrice, not of a very quick imagination, never fully understood facetiousness. She looked at her cousin now with genuine alarm.

'Now do, Beaty. You can equal Mrs. Crowther any day—even in experiences. I will see her. You know how sympathetic she is. She has gone through it all. They tell me it is not a month ago since she was hopelessly intoxicated at a dinner at Mrs. Thrale's, and was accusing all her intimate friends of secret tippling in the dining-room when they go to lie down.

Ha! ha! She will be invaluable to you, my dear girl.'

'I shan't go, Barnard; indeed, I shan't go.'

Tears had already started to the eyes of the susceptible girl.

'Nonsense; they are in need of all recruits. Temperance is not the strong point of Aggthorpe, however brilliant and obvious its other virtues. You can't refuse your help in such a good work.'

Poor Beatrice protested, with ludicrous if distressful earnestness, her incapacity and disinclination for the work, and Barnard, perceiving how well the joke was taking, continued to press his argument throughout the meal.

'No self-denial is necessary, Beaty. Look at Mrs. Crowther in all the dignity of

her ex-mayoresshood,' would the young gentleman run on. 'Drunk one day at a friend's table, (probably every day at her own,) an apostle of the Good Templars in public the next. A little hysterical remorse (isn't that the word?) watered judiciously by a little more religious drivel, and you are ready made. Come now, don't be bashful. It need not interfere with your having a glass of this sherry to-day,' he would say, holding up his glass by the mid-stem and regarding it against the sinking sunlight. 'It isn't at all bad. Come now.'

'No, thank you, Barnard.'

So they went on, until the fruit alone was before them. Then, with somewhat nervous alacrity, Beatrice rose from her chair, and her companion looked surprise.

The last orange rays of the sun smote the girl's features as she made the movement, and the tragical earnestness of her troubled face was intensified to a supernatural degree by the momentary glare imparted to it. The effect might have made some impression upon another observer, but only the jocular Barnard was its witness, and he enjoyed it.

'Why, there was wine in your face at that moment,' he exclaimed, hilariously. 'Sit down, Beatrice.'

'No, thank you, I want to go,' was her reply, as she moved across the room some paces.

'Sit down, I tell you,' cried the man, in an altered voice, also starting from his chair.

Beatrice stood.

'I wish to go, Barnard,'—there was timidity but some dignity in her tone.

'I wish you to stay, Beatrice,' was his mocking response.

After a glance into his features the girl returned, and took her seat upon the chair which she had vacated.

'You silly girl, what's the matter with you to-night? Here, take a banana.'

He tore one from the cluster, and almost threw it at her. Beatrice took it passively, and proceeded to open it upon her plate.

'It looks uncommonly dry,' remarked her companion. 'Here—you won't?'

'No, Barnard, I won't.'

He laughed and cracked his nuts.

After this, the talk became for a time a monologue. Beatrice made no reply to his merriment, but put morsel after morsel of

the soft fragrant banana into her mouth endeavouring to swallow it thus, but being time after time almost choked in so doing. It mattered not that it was soft, or that it was her one favourite fruit,—it was hard and bitter enough to her at this moment if never before.

'It's too dry to swallow, I can see,' said the gentleman, perhaps really thus interpreting her behaviour; 'you must have a drop of wine. Now which will you have? I'll fetch you anything you like with my own hands. What is it to be?'

'I will not have any wine, thank you.'

A frown ruffled the man's forehead this time, and he again stood up.

'Beatrice, you shall,' he cried. 'Which shall it be?'

'Barnard, I will not, I say,' she re-

sponded with momentary spirit, her eyes flashing as she stared at him.

'And I say you shall, miss,' returned he, coolly, pouring out a glass of sherry. 'Stay there, Beatrice. Sit in that chair again.'

She seemed seized with a sudden powerlessness, for at a touch of his hand upon her shoulder she sank into the chair. He paused then, and looked into her face.

'Why, what is the matter, Beaty? Don't be such a baby.'

'Are you going to ——'

'Yes, I am going to administer it like a kind physician, since you don't know what is good for you. Now, sit still, ha! ha! still, Beaty,'—for from sheer nervelessness her frame moved somewhat in the chair. Her eyes were closed as he came to her.

'Barnard, you don't know what you are doing to me,' she exclaimed, with a momentary effort, as the fragrance of the wine reached her nostrils.

'Don't I?' he remarked, drily.

In applying the wine-glass to her lips, the now angry blood-red sun cast his full glare upon their faces and upon the golden beverage which trembled in the man's fingers. The ruddy light thus unexpectedly suffusing the girl's features caused Barnard to start, and so to spill some of the golden drops upon the breast of Beatrice before the edge of the glass had touched her lips.

For a moment after the poor girl had taken the draught, she stared in utter vacancy at the table before her, her hands convulsively clutching the fringe of the

table-cloth, but all the rest of her frame in languid prostration. At Barnard's voice she awakened to full consciousness, and then burst into passionate tears.

This at length impressed the gentleman, and he rose from his chair with anxiety.

'Dearest Beatrice, don't be so ridiculous. What possible harm can it have done you? Do be reasonable.'

In alarm and perplexity he continued to pour forth endearing words into the ear of the distressed girl, but apparently without effect. When at length he ceased from his efforts, and had resumed his seat, she rose hurriedly and fled from the room.

During the days that followed, Barnard did perceive that there had been another

aspect to his joke. He felt considerable discomfort in the contemplation of it, and as he really had some liking for his helpless cousin, he was anxious to undo what he felt to be the amazing consequences of his own love of sport. For two or three days, at length, she was invisible under the plea of indisposition. On the evening of the third day when he returned from the town, and the maid offered the same excuse for her young mistress's absence, Barnard confronted her.

'What is the matter with her, Blackwell?'

The maid hesitated; unable to plead a cold.

'Does she have any wine?' inquired the gentleman, anxiously.

The girl paused, then impulsive for truth, exclaimed,

'Yes, sir, that's it.'

It was noticed that the young gentleman's dinner was barely tasted, and he rose from his solitary table before half had been placed before him. He withdrew to the library and scribbled a note there.

'For heaven's sake, Beatrice, resist. Your uncle returns in three days, and if he finds out this you know what will be the consequences. See me in the morning before I go.'

He rang the bell, and the same maid attended.

'Blackwell,' said Barnard, with unusual gravity, 'I want you to sit up with Miss Crossley to-night. Give her this note. Do

—do everything you can for her, you understand? Simply refuse to obey her. I must see her in the morning before I go.'

The girl promised to undertake the charge, and Barnard tried to compose himself for the evening.

In due course Mr. Goldhawke returned from Buxton, and he had not been in the house for twenty-four hours before he perceived that his journey had not been ineffectual. The change in his youthful housekeeper was immediately obvious to his merciless gaze, and, it has to be confessed, he saw it with satisfaction. The features of her hapless father were under these conditions painfully visible in the daughter, and it required nothing further

to stir up the very dregs of the hardened cynic's most malignant anger.

Although it was no part of Mr. Goldhawke's scheme to act precipitately, the catastrophe could hardly have been so long averted but for the vehement exertions of Barnard to assist and save his cousin. If amends for such enormity were possible, he did all that lay in human power to make amends for the terrible freak that had led to such tragic issue. But his efforts were unavailing. It was at the time of the autumnal equinox, during the latter days of September that the closing scene was enacted, and according to rumour, which doubtless emanated with fair accuracy from below stairs, it was accompanied with incidents of extremest brutality.

Even Barnard himself never knew them completely, for he was absent at the time of the occurrence. One windy night in September he was returning home at about nine o'clock. It was moonlight at the time, and as he entered the gateway in front of Grove House, he saw some movements which attracted his attention. Perhaps it was the sting of an uneasy conscience that made him turn thither with such alacrity, but, from whatever cause, he found there what with instinctive trepidation he had expected. Beatrice was in the hands of Blackwell.

'He is a wicked, cruel wretch,' the maid was exclaiming with ungovernable passion, 'and I'll never enter the house again, never. To think of a man treating any woman so, to say nothing of her as is his

own flesh and blood, and to whom he ought to have been a father. He'll be judged for it, that he will.'

She screamed as Barnard stepped up to them, but instantly she recognised him. So far as her excited condition permitted, she answered the young man's eager inquiries, and he knew that his worst fears were accomplished. It is enough that Beatrice had been flung ruthlessly from the doorway, and that the kind-hearted house-maid had taken her own instantaneous departure with her. We need inquire no further.

After exchanging a few words with the girl, Barnard conducted the two to a cottage on the common, and there made arrangements for their accommodation for the night. Despite the sincerity of his

intentions, here his own part in the drama had ended. Upon leaving the cottage he had exacted a promise from Blackwell and the inmates that Beatrice should not be allowed to depart before he had seen her in the morning; nevertheless, when he came to his appointment he was informed that she had escaped him. Efforts he had made then and subsequently to trace her, but no particle of success had attended them. Since that night neither he nor his father had seen Beatrice again.

This was the manner in which Miss Gertrude Crossley came to succeed her sister as confidential housekeeper to the wealthy proprietor of Grove House, on Warren Common, some years previous to the death of the old gentleman. As we

know, the better regulated and more judicious Gertrude had not read the lesson amiss.

CHAPTER VII.

HELEN LOOKS FORWARD.

The landlady of the 'Craven Heifer,' after an evening's confidential gossip with Beatrice over the hob, experienced such an awakening of matronly sympathy towards the friendless young woman, that she expressed her determination to vindicate the reputation of a Christian country by finding room for the reprobate traveller by her own side, upon her own widowed couch, for that one night at any rate.

'It was coming to some'at,' said this unsophisticated champion of her sex's instincts, 'when wor ain sisters could see us famishing by the road-side, and ne'er howd out a hand to gie us a lift out o' the slush into which they'd shoved us. That an owd atheist miser, not ower-wise in the intellects, should so behave, was credible enough, but that anything in a woman's mak could be so inhumin—eh, my!'

It followed consequently that, for twelve hours ensuing, the storm-tossed Beatrice found such rest, alike of body and soul, as had been unknown to her for many a long year by-past. With the morning light, however, tremors re-awakened, and to all the kind landlady's urgent representations the wanderer felt com-

pelled to turn a deaf ear. The atmosphere of Warren Common, which in her hungry and penniless condition, and under cover of night, had failed to assert its reminiscent fangs, now in the morning sunlight stung Beatrice with insupportable venom. All spirit sunk within her, and she marvelled how the errand of the previous evening had been in any way accomplished. It seemed to her at this moment, how immeasurably, easier to lie down and die in any covert ditch than to gain a moment's life by any aid from that appalling mansion. All her present impulse was to fly from the place's association without, if that could be, enduring one single glance of the place's hated scrutiny. But the morning even refused to be cloudy. In the full glare of the

sparkling October sunlight must she take her departure, as if courting the inspection of every dusky gorse-knob that studded the turf of the common. The only possible countervailing favour was the consideration of the day being Sunday, when the human element would, at any rate, be taking a few extra hours' needed repose, and so add, in the least possible degree, the terrors of their too curious inspection.

'But where will you go, Miss Crossley?' urged Mrs. Whitaker, in response to her visitor's stubborn determination.

'Anywhere from here. It doesn't matter much where.'

'Eh, but it does, lass. I can't abear to think of you going about the country with the like o' yon. Think o'

your mother, lass; think o' your mother.'

'I never had a mother, Mrs. Whitaker. At least, I never knew her. Besides, you are quite wrong in thinking so badly of Helen. Until I saw you last night, she is the only being in all the world that has helped to strengthen me against myself. If I could always be with her she could save me, I'm sure she could. She is different from other people; although she is wild in her manner, she is as good as she is beautiful. Really, Mrs. Whitaker, she is. If you had only seen her as much as I have done.'

'Well, I weunt quarrel with you, Miss Crossley, for parting words. I didn't like the look on her, that's all; nor her manner o' going on. It weunt lead her to no good, you'll see. But remember what I've

telled you. If you've a mind to settle down, come to me. I'll give you a home and welcome. I've no lasses o' my own, and you could be a help to me.'

But Beatrice shuddered again.

'I couldn't live here,' she said. 'I wish I had never come near the place.'

'But there's talk of their flitting——'

'It would make no difference. It isn't them only. The place brings it all back.'

'Ay, it's only natural, I suppose, poor thing,' replied the landlady, with a commiserating look. 'Well, ye'll tak that, anyhow.'

'No, no, Mrs. Whitaker; indeed I sha'n't——'

'I tell you you will, lass,' asserted Mrs. Whitaker, with characteristic determina-

tion in tone and action. 'Now, put it i' your pocket, and no words abaht it. And, if you will go, go now before there's mony folks about.'

After a little more amicable wrangling, the farewell was taken, and Beatrice set off once again on her aimless rambles.

Despite the blighted aspect of the locality, there was something of the serenity of a Sunday morning in the October sunlight as the young woman took her hurried way townwards. A few children from the houses not far distant had come to enjoy the freedom of the Common with their clean pinafores and faces, but Beatrice could encounter their glances with comparative serenity. For one thing, she was very fond of children, and for another their tender ages could scarce carry a sug-

gestion of those evil remembrances. A man was leaning over the canal bridge with his pipe, but whatever the tortures which the traveller inflicted upon herself in passing him, he had not consciously regarded her. Now that the open Common was behind her, and the road closed in to an ordinary suburban highway, Beatrice felt more secure in her concealment. Although it was deserted enough at this moment, the road was a much frequented one, and a casual passenger, in the ordinary course of things, received scant attention from anybody. The wholly altered aspect, too, of the locality served to reassure Beatrice. New rows of red-brick houses, in place of the green fields which she remembered, blunted the edge of her associations,

and probably thus rendered the first kindly service to any beholder since the time of their erection.

The road lay long and straight before her, with a human figure visible here and there upon it, but Beatrice only glanced along it occasionally. For the most part, her eyes were bent to the ground. At one point she came to a timber-yard with a long, low brick wall enclosing it, and piles of planks and beams within. She looked at it, and with her half-glance perceived figures standing in eager conversation at no great distance before her. This yard she remembered of old, and it renewed uneasy impressions, so she shrank into herself and hurried onwards. It was a man and woman talking there with their backs towards her.

In passing, some of the man's words were audible, uttered as it seemed with some vehemence.

'——is the first thing—nay, it may be said to be the only thing. Yesterday, you see, we easily disposed of some thousands of copies. It is within the limits of the most scrupulous moderation to consider that next week we shall double this. I put everything at the lowest, for the sake of absolute security in calculation. To build upon anything but certainties is disastrous. I need not hesitate to admit that my own experience has drilled me into this cautiousness. Now——'

The man's voice suddenly ceased, and, as the tones of it had engaged Beatrice's attention in an extraordinary degree, she was constrained to glance behind her to

learn the cause of the interruption. Both speakers were staring at herself, and to her amazement she perceived that one of them was none other than her beloved Helen. The latter grew radiant at the recognition, and instantly commanded her friend to pause.

'Why, Bee! Are you hurrying to church? The bells haven't begun yet.'

Father and daughter walked forward to Beatrice, the former with some benignant majesty saluting her.

'Where are you off to, old girl?'

'Into the town,' replied Beatrice, bashfully.

'No, no, come for a walk with us. I am not going to let you slip like that. We were coming to find you.'

'But you are going——'

Beatrice ended her sentence by a glance along the road she had traversed.

'Any direction, Miss Crossley,' interposed Mr. Pildacre, with an easy wave of his hand sweeping all the points of the compass. 'We are pledged to nothing.'

Accordingly, after a few more words of concession and entreaty, Beatrice was content to take her lot with them, mostly no doubt from the impression that she had not the remotest conception of what else she could do. When they were fairly under way, the journalist, who had from the outset cast an occasional glance of uneasiness at Beatrice, relieved himself to the following purpose.

'You eye me with suspicion, Miss Crossley,—no, no, do not apologise,—it is natural, inevitable. I flatter myself that

it was a trenchant article. It was intended to be, for nobody has yet been able to accuse me of putting any consons of private—private—profit or advantage, before a clearly indicated public duty. Force of circes has thrust me into the position of a—well, without inordinate presumption, I may say into the position of a leader of thought in this borough and purlieus adjacent, may I not, Helen? Exactly, exactly. Personal animosity, Miss Crossley, is a quality unknown to me. Facts and institutions I make war against, not persons. You understand this?'

'Certainly,' said Beatrice, readily assenting to she hardly knew what.

'That it—my theme, that is—should chance to be embodied this week in the

person of your lamented relative, is a mere—a mere coinci-dence.—Next week it might just as haply spring from my own self. You understand this? Exactly. We understand each other perfectly. No offence meant or taken. Well then, Helen——'

And therewith the good man launched into his own peculiar projects again, with such energy and single-mindedness as to preclude the interposition of any word (beyond the frequently demanded affirmative from Helen,) from other lips for a good half hour ensuing. There were peculiarities of vocabulary too in Mr. Pildacre which frequently rendered it extremely difficult for the uninitiated, like Beatrice, for instance, to gather his meaning. She concluded that this arose from his fre-

quent adoption of foreign words familiar to the highly cultivated, but in this she was in error. The fact was that the enthusiastic journalist had, to the age of forty, been by main vocation a copying clerk in a lawyer's office, and from extensive reproduction of legal drafts, abstracts of title, and the like, he had acquired the habit of thinking of certain words in the language under their draft or contracted aspect, with a mute hieroglyphical line over the top of it, and frequently, in impassioned debate more especially, he lapsed into this contracted form of speech, actually uttering the word as he would at the moment have written it. Thus the word premises, was usually articulated 'premes;' consideration, 'conson;' circumstances, 'circes;' and so on : so that unless

one happened to be familiar with this peculiar species of legal shorthand, the journalist's conversation was at times scarcely intelligible.

But the morning passed pleasantly to Beatrice, whether she understood the enthusiast's language or not. The man's genuineness of heart was apparent to all who came in contact with him, and as this was a quality of which the reprobate thought she had experienced the widespread dearth, she feasted in gratitude. Helen, perhaps, inclined to be flippant, but she displayed a solicitous respect for her father's euthusiasms. Thus all were in high spirits when at mid-day they reached the domicile over the offices of the *Moon* in Finkle Street, and fully prepared for the comparatively sumptuous

repast which, in honour of the visit from his daughter, Pildacre had ordered to be prepared for them.

Both Helen and her father determined to sustain the spirits of the party in face of the somewhat depressing atmosphere of the journalist's house. It was noticeable that, despite the professed joviality of the proceedings, the inevitable concomitant of substantial mirth was wanting. No alcohol appeared upon the table, nor did Mr. Pildacre find any necessity to apologise for the lack of it. The good man, with perhaps a suspicion of virtuous ostentation, poured himself out a tumbler of water, and looked at it against the light: then he passed the jug to his daughter. The features of the hostess meanwhile wore a singular expression of perplexity,

—tragical or ludicrous according to the ethical standpoint of the beholder. Beatrice, by her response to Helen's action, obviously preferred water to anything stronger.

Upon rising from the table, Mr. Pildacre sank into an insecure arm-chair which lurched from want of one castor; but having replaced the rough wedge which temporarily supplied the want, the journalist composed himself complacently. Helen dutifully supplied him with his tobacco box and 'churchwarden,' then helped her mother to remove the dinner-things. The washing-up was left for the following day, as Mrs. Pildacre withdrew to lie down. Helen, returning to the parlour, found her father already dozing, and Beatrice watching like a mouse.

The latter she beckoned from the room.

'Sixth edition, Helen, my girl,' muttered Nahum, looking up at the movements.

'Yes, father.'

And the door was closed.

The two girls dressed for a walk and went out.

'I want to talk to you, Bee,' said Helen as they were dressing, 'and I can't do it in here.'

They passed through the deserted streets of Aggthorpe, in a direction by which they would soonest reach the unbuilt-upon fields. The road, after they had passed the pavement, was black with coal-dust, and the hedges which fringed it were of the same funereal hue. No clusters of crimson haws, here; no last yellow and purple leaves to soothe the

twilight preceding the winter sleep. Blighted life cursed point-blank into ignoble death, unhouseled unaneled.

The last building which the girls passed, a large turreted building with formidable iron-railings enclosing the ground before it, was the work-house, pitched on this salubrious eminence presumably that paupers might expiate their crime of poverty not exactly at the cannon's mouth, but at the exact level of factory-chimney mouth, which is perhaps a little worse.

'I should like to go in there and have done with it,' said Beatrice, in passing the edifice.

'That isn't my ambition,' was the jovial response. 'Don't get sentimental, Bee.'

'It's not me that's getting sentimental, Helen,' returned Beatrice, constantly in-

tent upon an explanation of her companion's sudden departure from the 'Craven Heifer' the previous evening. 'I don't get my bills paid for me by gentlemen, at any-rate.'

Helen laughed aloud.

'I do; at least I have done once, if never again. That's what I want to tell you about, old girl. Such a lark you never knew. A real romantic infatuation. The man knows nothing about me, but is benevolently interested in me, that's all; you know the way. I believe he would marry me to-morrow morning if I asked him.'

'But who is he? I never knew you—'

'Nor I. He's a solicitor at Wallborough. A bit of religious mania I believe, that's the worst of it; but not a bad

fellow for all that. He wants to reform actresses—that is, if they're pretty. He won't fret about you, Bee, so don't be nervous.'

'But he can't marry all the pretty ones,' commented Beatrice, pettishly.

'I suppose he can't; but no doubt he thought I looked especially promising. He came to the "Red Lion" on Friday morning to see me, in desperation, having failed the night before. Poor man, he yearned for my welfare.'

Beatrice scrutinized her companion, never able fully to understand her humour, and having been made the butt of her fun too frequently.

'What if I marry him, Bee?'

'I should think you will, if you like him.'

Helen again laughed merrily.

'What a virtuosity you are! And what would become of you?'

'Of me! What does that matter? Gertrude wants me to go into a Reformatory. I promised to think about it.'

Helen started as if shot, then assumed a theatrical posture in the roadway.

'She asked you, Bee! That girl who calls herself your sister asked you to do this! She with her ten thousand pounds. —But what else did she propose to you? How much a week if you don't go into a work-house?'

Beatrice turned her face nervously to try and hide the blush which involuntarily overspead it. Helen again put her question.

'How much, Bee?' reiterated Helen, the muttering of Beatrice not being intelligible.

'We are to think about it,' faltered the other. 'She gave me plenty to go on with.'

'What do you call plenty?' cried Helen, fiercely. 'I insist upon knowing.'

'She gave me a sovereign, just then; it—it was all she had in her pocket—I expect.'

Helen's lips curled and her eyes flashed.

'And told you to seek for the rest in a work-house——'

'No, no, Helen; she never did that. She was kind; she kissed me——'

'Don't lie to me, Bee! She may have kissed you,—Judas kissed,—every false-

hearted scoundrel kisses; but she was not kind to you—kind to you!' exclaimed Helen again, quelling Beatrice by her glance. 'But let us go on.'

Somebody was coming along the road to disturb them. Helen dawdled until the stranger had passed.

'I demand a promise from you, Bee,—my poor Bee,' began the younger again, in a tone of mingled decision and tenderness. 'No, you must promise me without consideration. You cannot judge for yourself. Swear that you will never beg from that house again, nor from any one of the members of it. Beg from me and from me only. Promise this instantly and without reserve. Come!'

'But I don't want to beg from anyone,' returned Beatrice, inclined to whimper.

'You don't want to, Bee, but I tell you that you will *have* to, to the end of your days. Don't kick against the inevitable. Make the best of it rather in the manner I point out to you. Now, promise!'

'Yes, I'll promise.'

'Never to beg from anybody but me.'

'Never to beg from anybody but you,—if I ever have to beg.'

Thereupon the pair walked forward more briskly. The sunshine of the morning was now all obscured, and the grey blighted prospect was rendered doubly sombre by the louring clouds which, in unbroken ridges, bore down upon the landscape. The path which the girls pursued attained to a position of some altitude, from which could be beheld the valley of the river Cloaker,

after leaving Aggthorpe, and a wide range of country beyond. A country of much diversity and beauty naturally, but which the exigencies of an advanced civilization had ruthlessly desecrated. Blasted trees, of coats uniformly sable, and limbs of rigid decay, were sprinkled in the foreground amidst fields no longer green; and from the gloom of the mid-distance,—ground undulations there becoming as it seemed earth-born clouds of a hue and texture unknown to the heavens,—ranks of factory and coal-pit chimneys rigid in the inflexibility of death.

But the minds of the two wanderers were not to be engaged with the mere landscape before them. Although the currents of their individual thoughts were diverse enough, they had at least the power of in-

dividual absorption in common. In Beatrice, however, such absorption was that of mere aimless abandonment; whilst in Helen it was of comprehensive device. Thus after every period of silence the renewal of conversation lay invariably with the latter.

'That granted, then, Bee,' resumed Helen, as if there had been no break, 'I have something more to ask. To-morrow I shall leave Aggthorpe alone, and you must stay under my father's roof until you hear from me. Stare as much as you like, old girl; you will do as I say. It will probably not be for long, for I know you do not love the neighbourhood.'

'But, Helen, your father is not well off. I shall not give him any extra burden, not even for a week.'

'And do you think *I* shall, Miss Righteousness? I know what I am doing. You shan't burden him, don't fear. At least not through mere weight of victuals. If you do in any way, it will be through—through the devil himself.'

There was such unexpected display of vehemence in the conclusion that Beatrice took alarm. She seized her companion's hand and held it.

'My darling Helen, I swear that it shall not be through that. I won't touch one single drop of anything whilst I am with him; indeed I won't.'

'How can you keep that oath? You have sworn it before, many a time.'

'Yes, but never in exchange for kindness like this. You know what my life has been——'

'Well, don't make a scene. I know that you will at any rate try to keep it, Bee. Perhaps you may keep it the better if I tell you that the curse that is on you has been upon my father, through another, most of his life. It has crippled him, maddened him, ruined him,' continued Helen, with increasing vehemence, 'until now at middle age he is—Oh, poor man, I can't think of what he is; it maddens *me*, too. It has made his life a farce, and may yet make it a tragedy. Do you understand this, Bee? Will you think of it every day, and every moment of every day that you are beneath his roof?'

To Helen's impetuosity was added Beatrice's fervency of solemn assurance equally impetuous, and for a time thereafter thy walked forward in silence. The

astonishing tendency of things dazzled Beatrice, and she now could do little but listen to the energetic outpouring of her friend. Helen really displayed much intellectual activity, if not of a superlatively cultivated, at least by no means of a wholly ignoble, kind. Signs of a lively imagination were not wanting, however tinseled by the cynical flippancy of the time. At length she reverted to the subject of the Goldhawkes, and led Beatrice on to a disclosure of her former relations with the family fuller than the outcast had hitherto been willing to impart. Helen seemed to pay inordinate attention to a subject which must in the nature of things, one would have thought, directly have concerned her but little. It is true, there was a spice of dramatic interest in all that related to the

deceased capitalist, and perhaps it was this which exercised a fascination over Helen.

In this varied discourse the ramble of the girls was unexpectedly prolonged. The brief autumn twilight had already deepened when they were still some distance from the town, and as they returned homewards the orange strip between the dark cloud-curtain and the western horizon was fading to a dead brown. The obscurity seemed to have a directly opposite effect upon the two wanderers. Whilst Helen's buoyancy rose to an almost senseless exhilaration, the reserve of Beatrice sank to unmitigated despondency. Raillery in the former was of no avail, so at length she was content to confine herself almost exclusively to exuberant soliloquy.

The lamps were alight in the town, and

the bells were pealing clamorously from the church steeple as the girls drew near. Passengers were becoming more abundant in the street, engaged upon their various errands, sacred or profane. Helen scrutinized them all with a swift brief glance, and occasionally allowed her features to ripple into a smile. Beatrice kept her eyes invariably to the ground. At length they reached the entrance to the *Moon* yard in Finkle Street, and then disappeared.

The side door was fastened, so Helen knocked peremptorily. She had to repeat the summons. After a brief pause there was a sound of the latch drawn, and the door opened sufficiently to display the blanched features of Mrs. Pildacre by the light of a candle which she held out of the

draught. Helen pushed her way in rather rudely.

'What's the matter, mother?'

'Oh, my child, my child!'

'What *is* the matter?' repeated Helen, impatiently, brushing past her mother towards the parlour door whence issued a confused sound of voices.

Mrs. Pildacre seized her daughter's arm.

'He will kill you, too, my child,' she whined. 'It's Mr. Goldhawke—Sun-unday as it is—has come to—to m-murder your father. Oh, my child, my child!'

'Don't be ridiculous!' cried Helen, tearing herself away from her mother's grasp, for indeed the sounds within had undoubtedly at that moment changed in their

nature, and what at first had seemed but the hot words of chiding and contention, had advanced, as the old homilist perceived them generally to do, to 'further inconvenience.' The proceedings were confined to tongues no longer. As Helen rushed to the parlour door, Beatrice whispered tremulously in the weeping woman's ear, 'Is it Barnard?' But the words had scarcely escaped her before a masculine figure, lit for a moment by the candle's rays, pushed against them in the narrowness of the passage, knocked the candle to the ground, and hastened out through the doorway.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JOURNALIST'S REWARD.

The journalist's free criticism had struck the two most nearly affected by it in a totally different manner. We have had a glimpse of the younger brother Philip's humorous reception of it. His frank and by no means ungenerous disposition had developed him into a flippant, genial young sceptic of the contemporary school, and it was only natural therefore that Mr. Pildacre's fanatical principles should not

be able to extract more than good-humoured contempt from him. Barnard, it seems, had viewed it differently.

The brothers Goldhawke did not pretend to understand each other, nor had they ever done so from earliest boyhood. Human nature was at first to Philip merely a reduplication of the various impulses which he felt most prominent in himself. The absence of this or that particular faculty in any other specimen of the race had not occurred to him as a possible feature of the calculation. Experience had since made him wiser—so far, that is, as mere recognition of facts could lead him,—but it had not brought him any accession of tolerance for his brother's proclivities. Barnard was a good fellow enough, but he had hitherto allowed a

devouring commercial ambition to consume the more human qualities dormant in his nature. Philip lothed and despised commerce (save as it ministered to his personal requirements) and what he would have called the sordid ambition involved in it.

In their different attitude to the world at large was involved of necessity a corresponding attitude to the disposition of each other. Philip despised his brother and his propensities; Barnard as little appreciated the light proclivities of Philip, and was in no way propitiated by the contempt with which he knew his own to be regarded. The unprincipled testator had unquestionably played upon these differing constitutions in such a way as his shrewdness assured him would be effect-

ual. Had either brother been gifted with the least bit of additional intellect, no doubt the project had failed; but seeing that both were consumed with the normal proportion of pride in the first place, the chances of its success seemed established. Since their father's death, neither had spoken a word to the other of the competition which the will had instituted between them.

Philip as a man of some humour, and of still more natural indolence withal, had hardly yet been able to regard his own position in the matrimonial competition, so absorbed was he in the contemplation of the predicament of his brother. From this point of view he felt it a duty to take up the pursuit seriously, however personally inconvenient, with the sole purpose

of enjoying his brother's tactics. Still he liked to banter Gertrude with propositions as to his own proper course of conduct, for that such propositions were banter to her seemed to be tacitly understood by both of them.

The month, then, that had elapsed since Mr. Goldhawke's death had not been devoted to indiscriminate mourning. During the whole of that time Philip had resided at Grove House, for the most part with Gertrude alone, for Barnard had found it necessary to be much absent. He had, however, returned on this Sunday afternon, after the appearance of the notable article in the *Moon* on the previous day.

Miss Crossley, returning from church, had found Philip smoking cigarettes in

the room which had been the private sanctum of Mr. Goldhawke the elder. With a glance of much gravity she saw him lower to his knee the paper-backed volume which he had been reading, but no audible comment was passed upon it. Perhaps her own prayer and hymn-books were of set purpose held rather prominently forward, but if any reproof were intended, it was accepted with all Philip's customary silent good-humour.

'Good sermon, Dude?'

'I don't go to church for the sermon, Philip, as I have had to tell you before.'

'But you don't come out before it, nevertheless,' was his pleasant rejoinder.

'Really, Philip, what a singular remark!'

'I'm reading a tale here about a fellow not half unlike myself,—with reference, I mean, to you know—the competition. Ha, ha! But he——'

'Indeed!'

'Wait a bit, Gertrude! It isn't in French, really. "The Price of a Wife:" have you read it?'

But Gertrude escaped, and Philip hummed a tune.

In the afternoon Miss Crossley appeared in more pliant mood, and her companion was ready to take advantage of it. They were strolling about the premises, the gentleman smoking a cigar, and flinging jokes to the noisy rooks.

'Well, I suppose I must myself begin to beat the covers,' he said, glancing at his companion's features.

Gertrude was but too plainly ignorant of his meaning.

'Barnard has already had undue start; don't you think so, Gertrude?'

'How can I have an opinion on the subject?'

'The worst is that there are no preferential covers to beat. I wonder where Barnard's scent lies,—do you know, Dude?'

'Philip, don't be so flippant on such a subject.'

The gentleman laughed.

'One would naturally feel disposed to turn to the elect, but that I fear the elect will view the terms with suspicion. I suppose I must scent mungo at Wadsett. A fifty thousand portion is nothing there, I understand. You will grant your blessing upon my enterprise?'

'The heart of a noble enterprise is a blessing,' rejoined Gertrude, turning epigrammatic for the nonce.

'And conversely, the heart of an ignoble one a——? Ha, ha! You are quite a sage, old girl. You must have been reading Plato lately. But you wish me well?'

'You know it, Philip.'

'And I you, Gertrude. What are you going to do?'

'Oh, that doesn't matter,' she said, lightly, avoiding his glance.

He took her shoulder kindly and made her face him.

'It does matter, dear girl. You know it matters to me. I am a self-constituted brother to you, and I want to——'

They were within sight of the front

gate, and at the sound of a vehicle both turned in that direction. A hansom had just drawn up there, and a gentleman was alighting from it.

'Barnard,' said Philip, with a twinkle. 'He got the newspaper, then.'

Both walked towards the new-comer.

The features of Mr. Barnard Goldhawke were set as he approached the pair, wearing a look which seemed natural to his clean-shaven countenance. Civilly he shook hands with them both, and for a minute or two they endeavoured to sustain an interchange of small-talk.

Barnard was only about thirty now, and he looked a handsome enough man of the world. His devotion to magnificent commercial enterprise had imprinted a somewhat elderly look upon his face, and his

manner was habitually taciturn. He had never greatly cultivated social intercourse, although he was said to be a genial enough fellow if you could thaw him. Some pronounced him to be the successor to his father, but others knew that this did him gross injustice. Commercially ambitious he was to extravagance, but this taint had not as yet extinguished his human qualities, only obscured them. That he had never wholly abandoned the search for the hapless Beatrice, in whose fate he felt such an uncomfortable interest, argued some human susceptibility in him. Moreover, a devotion to his commercial ideals, arid enough as they were, perhaps gave evidence of more natural potentiality than lurked in all the hollow smooth-faced negation of the well-fed Philip.

Barnard could not long sustain the pretence at conversation. He brought it to abrupt termination by producing a newspaper from his pocket, and thrusting it towards his brother.

'Have you seen that?'

Paper and type too plainly bespoke the *Moon*.

'I have,' said Philip, with a smile.

The brother could scarce disguise his irritation at the man's nonchalant bearing.

'And have you thrashed Pildacre?'

'Well . . . I haven't. That, in fact, never occurred to me as an inevitable conclusion.'

A look from the elder was all his response, and he strode towards the house. When Barnard was fairly beyond earshot, Philip burst into unrestrained laughter, in

which Gertrude felt compelled to join. Between the young lady and her elder cousin real cordiality had never been established (some attributed this to misunderstanding upon the subject of the unfortunate sister's delinquencies); and so perhaps Philip's mirth proved the more readily infectious.

'Some effect I looked for, but scarcely this,' was Philip's comment; and he and Gertrude parted.

A short time later the two brothers were together in the smoking-room, the elder pacing the floor impatiently.

'I should have thought the most dignified course lay in ignoring the poor devil,' Philip was saying, severely restraining his laughter. 'It is a legitimate catch-penny.

Could one expect him to resist it?'

'Expect him! What do you mean, man? It is meant for a deliberate insult to me personally.'

'I wasn't aware of that. I knew the man wasn't within possible range of insulting me, so it only amused me.'

'Amused you?' cried Barnard, angrily. 'What serves to anger you, then, in the world which you inhabit?'

'I am afraid I don't exactly know. But I don't suppose we shall greatly improve the situation by discussing it. If you take my advice, you'll just——'

'I didn't ask for your advice.'

'Very good. I thought you did.'

And, closing the door behind him, Philip heard no more.

Until sunset Barnard remained alone in

the same room. He confessed to more local association in his native district than Philip was able to, and this no doubt had some effect upon his susceptibility to local ridicule. His father's will under any aspect exasperated him beyond utterance, but to see it thus flaunted verbatim in the public gaze almost maddened him. What his secret ruminations were nobody knew, nobody inquired. It was observed, though, that when the western horizon was colouring,—that horizon in face of which Helen and Beatrice were at that moment walking,—Barnard issued forth and went, as was supposed, townwards.

There was a field-path to the town from this point, which, after sundry meanderings, brought one to the bridge over the river Cloaker, at the lower part of the

town—the place at which Helen had dismissed her enthusiastic cavalier, Mr. Clement Secroft. This was the path which Barnard was taking. When he reached the town bridge,—he had, with obvious intention, lingered at certain points of his walk as the daylight was stubborn,—when at the bridge the twilight was deepening and the lamps were already alight, so that he would have little difficulty in escaping observation, such clearly being his intention. The church bells were pealing over the town, and passengers were becoming more numerous on the pavement. The gentleman walked at a brisk pace up the long broad Finkle Street, observing other passengers sufficiently to escape collision with them, but nothing more. At a cer-

tain point his pace was slackened, and he looked critically at the house fronts on the pavement. The shutters were up at the office of the *Moon*, and no lights appeared in the windows above it, but as a lamp-post stood directly opposite the good journalist's doorway, there was no difficulty in speedily identifying Mr. Pildacre's commercial and domestic quarters.

Into the dark entry, accordingly, the well-known capitalist plunged, and great was the pity that none of his interested fellow-townsfolk chanced to recognize him as he did so. The house-door was on the shaded side of the way, and for a moment Mr. Goldhawke had to grope along the wall to discover it. Once fairly confronted, however, he disdained to spend further time in seeking for the bell-knob,

so knocked loudly with the handle of his stick. Response was speedily forthcoming. Mr. Pildacre was at home, and the visitor entered.

Not until he was within the passage did Mrs. Pildacre recognise to whom it was she had the honour of speaking; and, when she did so, her composure left her.

'Mr. Goldhawke!' she exclaimed, in a tone of consternation.

'Yes, it is,' responded her visitor, with significant decision, and followed her towards the parlour.

Possibly the journalist had felt qualms at the strange masculine tones within his doorway; for, although his legal knowledge was sufficient to assure him that Sunday was a *dies non* in matters of ordi-

nary process, his life-long experience had perhaps worked him up to the momentary expectation of what was beyond the ordinary. He had stood screened within the parlour doorway, with his head bent nervously forward to put, if at all that were possible, a favourable construction upon the unknown accents. His wife's exclamation gave him the clue he was in need of, and immediately he felt the courage of an enthusiast. It was before the clamouring of creditors only that the virtue of Mr. Pildacre's convictions was able to desert him. With a tug at the bottom rim of his waistcoat, and an adjustment of the shoulders, the editor of the *Moon* advanced boldly to meet his critic.

'Mr. Goldhawke, did I hear?' he asked,

with the bland assurance of an Englishman within his castle.

'You did, sir.'

And the two turned abruptly to the parlour. The housewife, naturally, took up her position outside the door.

The journalist's politeness was rejected without ceremony by the visitor, and not the most innocent of editors could mistake the attitude of his guest.

'You are proprietor, editor, and printer of this filthy rag, I understand,' observed Mr. Goldhawke, holding from the tips of thumb and forefinger a crumpled specimen of the second edition of the journalist's now famous issue of the previous day.

'I am proprietor, editor, and printer, sir, of nothing meriting such uncleanly

epithets,' returned Nahum, mildly, but with no want of firm dignity in tone and bearing. 'I am the instrument, humble and unfortunately devoid enough of such talents as are requisite——'

'You wrote and issued this scurrilous libel upon—upon my family, I presume. You had the requisite talents for that.'

'I will not pretend to misunderstand your reference. Acting upon a principle which has become a religion to me, I wrote and issued certain strictures upon a piece of more or less public behaviour on the part of a gentleman of note in this borough; if, in the fulfilment of such duty——'

'Duty, you scoundrel!' cried Goldhawke, angrily. 'It is an infamous libel, and, on the part of a fellow like you, a

piece of especially damned insolence. I am quite aware that it is directed against me personally, therefore it is with me personally that you will have to settle. You will begin this instant with a humble apology to me—on your knees. Down at once, sir!'

'If my words can technically be brought under the appellation libel,' began Pildacre, waiving with dignity the immediate issue sought by his antagonist, 'you know how to obtain reparation, Mr. Goldhawke. I contend that the reflections which mere public duty called upon me to make—you will not lose sight of the responsible position into which natural circes have thrust me, sir—I contend that in the position which I occupy——'

'Damn your position!' cried Goldhawke, with an impetuosity which caused the journalist to recede a pace or two preparatively. 'Your position at this moment, I tell you, is to be at my feet upon the floor——'

'In view of the work which I have had entrusted to me,' interposed the journalist, 'I may say, without presumption, that a reversal of the relative attitudes proposed by you would better meet the requirements of the—— Beware what you are about, sir!' exclaimed Pildacre, stepping hastily backwards to place the table between himself and his incensed visitor.

'I will beware,' returned the other, forcibly, advancing with direful intent obvious alike in face and movement.

'I have done my duty,' cried the journalist, rounding the corner of the table with noticeable alacrity.

'And I will do mine,' was the retort of him in pursuit.

'Mr. Goldhawke—' Pildacre ducked and darted round a corner—'I don't know what is your intention, Mr. Goldhawke. I am not a pugilist. I am not a—— Stand back, sir!'

A violent cut across the shoulder from the walking-stick of the visitor gave the journalist the resolution necessary for confronting his assailant. His resolution, however, unattended by the proper pugilistic accompaniments, was unavailing, and proved no match for the ferocious attack with which Barnard instantly assailed him.

Mr. Pildacre was not exactly a muscular

man, but his submission to such ignominious treatment at the hands of a man like Barnard Goldhawke must have argued an exceptional degree of physical cowardice. Muscular retaliation seemed to find no place in the journalist's intention; all his efforts were directed to possible security beneath the table. At length he obtained this, and his assailant, considering his errand sufficiently accomplished, uttering anathemas of a violent order, turned and left the chamber.

Any movements outside were of course inaudible to the two so engaged in the parlour; the return of Helen and Beatrice, therefore, at the moment of the pursuit round the table having become critical, was unknown to them. As Goldhawke brushed past the women in the passage,

knocking the candle from the hand of Mrs. Pildacre in his exit, he paid no heed to the figures which were standing there.

Both Helen and Beatrice had seen his face in the candlelight before it was extinguished, and the latter experienced a singular thrill of emotion as she recognized the features, and then felt the figure knock against herself. Helen was, for the moment, wholly taken up with anxiety for the safety of her father, and, hurrying forward to the room, looked anxiously around her.

'Father!' she exclaimed, the journalist being still screened between the legs of the table.

'Helen, my girl,' responded the man, with piteous alacrity, as it seemed, revived at once by the sweetness of the unex-

pected accents, 'you witness my humiliation even as you were a party to my triumph.'

As he spoke, he came creeping out into the open.

'What, has that man dared——'

'A trifle, Helen. An inevitable result of fulfilling a duty in the face of an unprincipled world. Phew!'

Helen took her father's arm and helped him to the chair. Then the other two entered.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCENT.

'"FIAT JUSTITIA,"' murmured the sorely bruised journalist, as he adjusted himself, with the least possible suffering, to the angles of the well-worn arm-chair. 'I will do my duty, Helen, though a hundred ruffians should assault and batter, nay, should inflict upon me bodily harm to the technical extent of mayhem.'

'Certainly you will, father,' replied the girl, who was standing apart in a state of engrossing meditation.

'My remedy against him might be severe: I might without difficulty, with positive justice, as most would hold, seek for the utmost rigour of the law. My right, I say, empowers me thus far. But, Helen, I waive it. From no temporal hands will I seek reparation. To suffer in the cause of virtue, I lay no claims personally, God knows; but the cause, the cause,—it is virtue. To suffer for it is a reward which my poor efforts have hardly merited.'

'You have a duty, Nahum,' interposed the housewife, whimpering; 'you have a duty to a wife and family, as well as to virtue and the cause.'

'Silence, woman!' roared the journalist. 'Tempt me not. Are you calculating already the vile advantages to be ex-

pressed from such—ho, phew!—from such an incident? Would you fatten upon blackmail? Aroint thee, witch!'

'I think that when your family is in want of the necessaries of——'

'—of death, damnation, and hell!' shrieked Pildacre, drowning the word with which his wife had seen fit to conclude. 'Do not blaspheme, woman!'

Helen glanced at her friend Beatrice with a mere upward ripple of the brow by way of light emphatic comment upon the significance of the conversation. Beatrice was still trembling.

'You shall not want for the necessaries of life, mother,' interposed Helen, with noticeable composure. 'I will see to that, at any rate. I wholly agree with you, father,' she went on, placing her hand

upon the back of the chair in which he was sitting, and looking down upon his bald head reflectively. 'It would be ignominious to seek for mere penal satisfaction from such a ruffian. As you say, pursue your duty as heretofore, and forget the existence of him.'

In pain as the journalist was, this speech acted like magic upon him. What the faith of Kadijah was to the prophet of the faithful, Helen's encouragement was to Nahum Pildacre at this moment. He felt renewed confidence in himself. Tears started to his eyes as he regarded Helen, and with unrestrained emotion he pressed his daughter passionately to his heart. All kept silence, and in silence the journalist resumed his seat.

Beyond these few words to her father,

Helen betrayed nothing of the effect the scene had had upon her. That it had not merely come and gone like any other of the odd experiences of her daily life, her occasional conduct seemed to indicate. An unusual degree of thoughtfulness was upon her, although she made an effort from time to time to gloss it over by exceptional hilarity. Only Beatrice noticed Helen closely. She had accustomed herself of late to a solicitous perusal of her friend's countenance, but she had not hitherto discerned any expression which seemed to go beyond the range of comedy. But when she now caught Helen's eyes in a far-off glance, she thought something more was to be perceived there.

Later, the two girls were alone washing up the tea things. Mrs. Pildacre, un-

nerved by the shock, had gone to lie down : the journalist groaned in his arm-chair.

'What—what are you thinking about, Helen?' ventured Beatrice, her eyes bent timidly to the vessel that her hands were engaged with.

Helen started as though aroused from slumber.

'Yes!' she cried, with heedless irrelevance. 'What did you say, Bee?'

The other repeated her question, raising her eyes this time.

'Thinking about? Wait and see, old girl. I shall leave here to-night, Bee.'

'To-night! Then I——'

'—Will stay here. You have given me your promise. You know what you promised?'

Helen looked fixedly into her companion's eyes.

'Yes, yes, I know. And I will keep it. I swear I will.'

'All right, Bee. I shall trust you. It is for your own good, mind.'

Then Helen relapsed into silence, and in this way the remainder of their work was accomplished.

'Helen, my girl, be seated. I have much to talk about, very much. It is good of you to come here: like a ray of——'

'Is it right?' interposed the daughter, nodding towards a time-piece upon which her eye had rested.

'Half-an-hour fast. We have a good evening before us. If I could only tell you——'

'Can you lend me a sovereign, father?'

'Twenty, my own girl,' hastily ejaculated the journalist, thrusting his hand into a pocket of imaginary profundity. 'At least—But, be seated—we can talk of——'

'What's this, Bee? Bah, nonsense!'

With tremulous ecstasy, Beatrice had thrust her sovereign secretly into Helen's hand.

'You shall, Helen?' cried the giver, passionately, starting back from her friend's advances.

'Well, yes, I will, Bee.'

The transaction ended, and they all sat down.

For half-an-hour the journalist harangued them. The great privilege of

martyrdom seemed to have touched new veins in him, and he worked them enthusiastically. Groans were interspersed, the result of any needful gesticulation which the subject.matter occasioned, but they served rather to develop than to interfere with the threads of the impassioned discourse. Necessarily, when the interruption came, the effect of it was tragic. Nahum's hands were uplifted, and his features assumed an expression of blank despair.

'To-night, Helen!' was all he could utter.

'It is necessary that I go to-night, father, else you know that I should stay.'

The journalist offered no syllable of expostulation; the effect upon him was

too complete for that. As Helen hurriedly got together such few things as she needed, even she did not quite realize the state of collapse from which her father suffered. His exuberance, the joint fleeting effect of last night's five editions, and his daughter's reappearance had no independent ground to stand upon. At the moment of such reverse as this, he could see it clearly, and the sense of overwhelming liabilities gathering round him, like the flowing tide around a lonely rock, settled irresistibly upon him. In this light, the five editions what were they? Not enough even to meet the accumulating arrears of his long-suffering Jesse, to say nothing of——But Helen was going.

Such sleep as Mr. Pildacre was to obtain throughout the night ensuing, he

obtained in that same uneasy posture in his arm-chair.

Helen had left no time to spare, for as she entered the station, the train for Wallborough was drawing up at the platform. Hastily she booked, and took her seat. Doors were slammed and the train started.

The girl sat alone in her compartment in a tremulous state of cogitation. The world seemed to totter about her under the weight of her impulsive resolution. Every incident of the last two days thronged confusedly through her heated brain, but all seemed to afford encouragement and stimulus for what she had in hand.

Helen's mind, wholly freed from the restraints of self-curbing principle, mount-

ed to the most extravagant heights of sensational or dramatic imagination. She had had an excellent education at the Girls' High School of her native town, and had shown herself competent to reap to the full the benefit of such modern advantages. From that she had advanced to a governess-ship in a family of social distinction, and had in that capacity also acquitted herself to the infinite approbation of her superiors. The step from that to a place on the boards of a provincial theatrical company may seem an odd one, nevertheless it had been taken. In that capacity Helen had hardly had a fair trial, as circumstances had prematurely cut short her experiences before even she herself was fully aware of her histrionic abilities. Now, yet another

attraction had of a sudden engaged her, and upon this her imagination had fastened with an engrossing power which bid fair to eclipse all the rest.

The matrimonial competition which the Goldhawke will had instituted between the two brothers had, in the first place, appealed irresistibly to Helen's sense of humour, and, in an instant following, to her instinctive craving for sensation. She was not of a sentimental constitution, therefore, up to the present time, the matrimonial aspect of life had only presented itself to her in its strategic or purely dramatic character. It was an act of life by no means to be neglected, seeing the glowing possibilities which it undoubtedly presented; but which nevertheless, in the face of her immediate

circumstances, had not yet come within the practical range of her engagements. Two days had been sufficient to effect a change in all this.

Love of adventure was strong in Helen; love of her father was still stronger. If the former could be indulged at the same time that the latter was being promoted, she felt that she had alighted upon an ideal set of circumstances, of which nothing but malign fate should deprive her. Her blood boiled at the consideration of the indignities to which her father had that night been subjected, and her sense of dramatic, rather than ethical, justice clamoured for revenge against the perpetrator. No wonder that the temptation proved irresistible, and that Helen decided to launch upon an enterprise in which

so much of her nature would be involved.

As the train rattled on its way only the exhilarating successful aspect of the project assailed her. Given one or two preliminaries of success, how consummate would be her triumph! Barnard's absorbing commercial ambition was matter of universal comment. Were he indifferent to it, the triumph would be paltry. But, in the face of such powerful inducement, the victory of a penniless schemer, and she the daughter of the editor of the *Moon*, assumed positively royal proportions, and was a consummation worthy of superhuman effort to accomplish.

CHAPTER X.

AN ACCOMMODATION.

Shortly after nine o'clock that night, as Clement Secroft was sitting with his mother in the quietude of a well-ordered Sabbath, the maid entered with a note for him. He looked up from his book and took the letter.

'Not business to-night, Clement?' said the lady.

'Nothing, I exp——' He stopped, and the expression of his face changed. With

the obvious intention of passing something off, he got up and looked at his watch. 'Only a little after nine. I had better go to-night.'

'I am sure it can stay, my dear boy. You will do it better in the morning.'

'Not business, mother. Works of mercy and necessity, you know, are excepted.' And, with a little laugh, he left the room. Putting his head in again, he said, 'I don't think I shall be long, but if after ten don't stay, mother.'

In a minute or two the front door was closed.

It was a breezy, starlight night, and Clement walked briskly to the hotel from which Helen's note was directed. She had said to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, but he had another engagement

at that time, or at any rate imagined that he had, and the present moment seemed very much more convenient. In all sincerity, Helen was not in the least expecting this. She had composed herself in the ladies' drawing-room quite comfortably, and was engaged in perusing the pages of a fashionable weekly newspaper, sacred to the interests of a very feminine constituency.

With idle complacency Helen turned the leaves, and, to do her justice, found the subjects treated of incomparably dull. She did not belong to this orthodox feminine constituency for which the paper existed. Whatever life was to her, (and what it was it would have been difficult to formulate,) obviously it was not the pitiful vacuity abhorred of milliners' and

society rinsings. Something else was in possession, sufficiently powerful to repel this insidious current. It chanced that, before throwing aside the paper, Helen's eyes fell upon the advertisement pages. The perusal of an item or two aroused her, and she proceeded with additional interest.

Various wants and offers tickled her imagination, and from the bare announcement of facts, of more or less ludicrous significance, Helen involuntarily evolved successive chapters of family history of the greatest possible interest and diversity. One particular paragraph had just arrested her, when an attendant entered and brought over to her a tray bearing a gentleman's card. Despite her surprise, Helen took it with well-bred calmness.

'The gentleman is waiting, ma'am.'

'Yes, one moment.'

Looking again at the paper in her lap, Helen re-read the advertisement which had last engaged her; then, with a complacent smile, rose from her couch and followed the attendant.

In a private room she found Mr. Clement Secroft, and she greeted him with dignity.

'Do forgive my troubling you, Mr. Secroft. I had no thought of seeing you to-night.'

'You know, Miss Ilderton, that it is a pleasure for me to wait upon you. I am engaged in the morning.'

'I am afraid you will think this action of mine strange, and probably indelicate,' began Helen, with a winning propriety of

demeanour which fascinated the young lawyer; 'but my lonely position compels me to take strange courses. I have a matter of importance to consult you about, and I thought it could be done more thoroughly and easily in conversation than by letter. You will not misunderstand me, Mr. Secroft?'

'I hope not,' assented the other, with undisguised cordiality.

'I have urgent need of a thousand pounds,' Helen continued, with frank alacrity, fixing her calm maidenly gaze upon Clement's face; 'in order to repair a very great wrong. The amount startles you, I see,' she went on, lightly, 'but the suggestion is not so ridiculous as it may appear. My acquaintance with you does not warrant a request that you should

help me to such a sum, I know too well; but I have no where else to turn, for nobody else would receive a mere word by way of security. However, my impudence is not so great as it may appear. In twelve months, Mr. Secroft, I can repay the money with proper interest upon it. Can you help me?'

Clement could not disguise from himself that he was staggered. The collapse of a company of country players had been the means of introducting him to this young lady: his consequent sentimental interest in her was unbounded certainly: but—a thousand pounds. It was more than he expected. He possessed the sum, it was true, and could speedily realize it; but principled though he was, and in love, he was after all of legal training,

not without some knowledge of life, and human. The security was questionable. Helen still looked at him, and he at her. She was beautiful,—very beautiful, Clement thought, with this slight additional colour, especially, and, for one instant, from her eyes he drew an unworthy suggestion. A thousand pounds was not too much to——

'Helen——'

But his soul stifled the thought. To call her wife he would not buy her.

'——I am not sure that I can raise the money.'

He only said this to gather time for thought; and Helen knew that his words were by no means final. The delay was natural and what she had expected. In fact, the whole of his struggle was clearly

legible to her, and, although not sufficiently inhuman to regard it with indifference, there was a more powerful emotion stirring her, of effects apparently grossly selfish, but for which in reality she would gladly have given her own body to the flames, had circumstances demanded such oblation. Wilfully she in no way ministered to his emotion, but at the cost of anything or anybody she would minister to her own.

'Are you not?'

No doubt, if Clement had been worldly wise, he would here have closed his ears and fled from her presence. But he did not.—He inhaled the ravishing tones,—just then so sweetly solicitous, so anxiously dependent,—and dwelt upon them. The poor man's good principles were very

traitors to him. A man of the world could have faced her calmly. He knew quite well that he was already vanquished, but there was still delay.

'Take a chair, Miss Ilderton . . . A thousand pounds, you said.'

'With no security.'

'No security!' he exclaimed, artlessly, or with artfulness supreme. 'You gave your word.'

'Does that suffice? I did not know money could be raised so easily. But yes, you have my word.'

'It is security for me. When do you want the money?'

'At the earliest moment possible.'

'You shall have it on Tuesday morning. But do you wish it in cash?'

'Mr. Secroft——' Helen began, but

instantly checked the effusive impulse. 'I——'

'What were you going to say, Helen?'

'Nothing,' laughed she, lightly. 'I can't thank you for your kindness.'

To say that the young lady was amazed at her success in such extraordinary demands would not be strictly accurate. From the beginning to the end of her project nothing but success seemed possible to her, upon no adverse conditions could her sanguine nature base a moment's calculation. To such conclusion had all her experiences tended. Nevertheless, in much desired assurance there is generally an element of pleasurable astonishment. Yet once again was Clement sorely tempted; needless to repeat that he triumphed. It is the man of

principle's duty to pay in this world: the inevitable essence of his temperament: the acknowledged privilege of virtue.

'That is thanks enough,' he remarked, and his eyes were removed from her features.

There was nothing base in Helen's nature, however overweighted with the frivolous, hence his reckless generosity really touched her.

'You ask no questions,' she said, winningly; 'lay down no conditions. How do you know that I am not seeking the money for the worst of purposes?'

'Simply because I don't think you capable of the worst of purposes. Furthermore, you yourself have stated for what you want it. To repair a great wrong

cannot but be amongst the very best of purposes.'

Inwardly Helen's nature trembled. She knew how she was trifling with him.

'But there are various methods of reparation. What if mine were vindictive?'

He looked up at her.

'I don't think,—but I don't care if they are.'

Helen felt guilty of her evil influence, but such sense sat lightly upon her just now.

'To go further, Mr. Secroft, I must tell you that I have expectations of a considerable amount of property in connection with which, some time during the next twelve months, I may require your professional assistance. I may ask for it?'

'Clients are not unwelcome to me,' said the young lawyer, pleasantly.

Nevertheless, her statement disquieted him. Anything more than a simple statement of facts, in the present instance, his instinct did not lead him to look for. His heart sank merely at the thought of his not being in such supreme command as circumstances had hitherto seemed to suggest to him. One or two other cases of social somersault had, singularly, been engaging his attention of late. To do justice to one side at least of Clement's nature he undoubtedly preferred to think of Helen penniless.

'For the present,' the young lady continued, with well-bred nonchalance, 'I am going to stay with some friends in the country, but I shall be for a short time

in London first, and I want to ask you, Mr. Secroft, if you will open an account for me at a London bank with this money we are speaking of.'

Clement felt at this point an unpleasant twinge. For an instant it seemed as though his unclouded reason flashed full upon the situation, and revealed the gossamer threads which were fast spinning about him. But he looked again at her, and everything was altered.

'Certainly; my London agents will introduce you to the —— and —— Bank.'

'Thank you.'

Helen did not this time slip into undue effusiveness.

'In this case,' said Secroft, 'my cheque will be sufficient. You shall have that in the morning.'

So far as mere business was concerned, this concluded the interview. Nor indeed were the succeeding generalities long indulged in. After making his wholly unconditional concessions, Clement felt unaccountably depressed. Tender personalities, or any hint at such, were, under the circumstances, obviously forbidden. Perhaps it was this enforced repression that most affected the young lawyer The interview seemed wasted.

So in a short time Mr. Secroft left the hotel, and Helen returned to the drawing-room.

Once alone, and Clement felt the full force of the predicament. The wind was blowing freely, and although in his absorption his steps had instinctively brought him to his own door, when before it he

hurried on. The large clock of the parish church chimed the quarters,—a quarter to ten. It was early yet. But, early or late, what mattered it? He hurried on.

The full madness of his behaviour was now apparent to him. That the girl was fooling him he had no doubt. Such imposition was of every-day occurrence: he knew it, but was powerless. How could she be other than a base adventurer? She had not even taken the trouble to depart from the traditional methods; to invent some tolerably new mode of effecting her plausible extortion. Her brilliant aspirations might at least have sharpened her faculties. Clement laughed, as it seemed, with real malignity. He felt a momentary vigour.

Wandering on in this embittered state of revolt, of a sudden he discovered that it was by no means Helen that he railed at, but his own imbecile, miserable self: his own principled nature that at heart he was reviling. He did not care for the lucre, of that he was tolerably assured, but who save a lunatic would refuse the good it might buy him? The situation was his own. Some fruit of it, at least, should be his own also. Each moment confirmed it. Speedily arguments appeared by which the desired fruit became a virtue. This attained, how far could it not bear him? With it, sublimated to a resolution, Clement ultimately sought his home.

Here the virtue still sustained him, and, reduced to practical proportions, before

he retired for the night it had taken this written shape:

'Dear Miss Ilderton,

'My feelings towards you have not been disguised, however strongly circumstances have compelled me to suppress them. After our interview to-night I need suppress them no longer. In place of what I had promised to send you, may I offer *more*, and in so doing undertake personally, as a sacred charge, the reparation which you have at heart? I await your permission for another meeting after eleven o'clock in the morning.

'Yours always,

'Clement Secroft.'

Fit and promising as this seemed under

the frame of mind already referred to, to the spiritual vision of the morning it appeared altogether different. Hurrying to a last perusal, with a view to an immediate delivery of the important letter, Clement was amazed at his last night's arguments. They had lost vitality. The consequence was that the flames had the letter, and the lawyer could find but small appetite for his breakfast.

From his office he wrote a few quite different words to accompany the cheque, and a clerk delivered it.

Before receiving this communication, Helen had had a short walk in the streets of Wallborough. It was quite possible that another inhabitant or two, besides the sentimental solicitor, might recollect

her features, so the young lady avoided all unnecessary publicity. The particular establishment she was in search of was not of commonly reputable resort, but fortunately it was not situated in a main thoroughfare, so thus far circumstances aided her. Helen was blessed with a pre-eminently prepossessing exterior, and possibly in some measure, on such account the world was rendered generally smooth about her. From the establishment in question to the hotel, she returned richer by two Bank of England notes to the amount of ten pounds, and poorer by two or three trinkets to perhaps twice the value. For the time being, a very reasonable compromise.

Helen now really felt in very satisfactory plight. Activity of this sort was

the breath of life to her, and when sustained by what she herself felt to be comprehensive scope for really important development, the situation presented life in a very piquant and desirable aspect. She had but just risen from the breakfast-table when Mr. Secroft's letter was brought in to her. It required all the young lady's vigour to repress the tremulous tendency of the fingers as they closed upon the envelope, but repress it she did. She was intent upon convincing even herself that she possessed every qualification necessary for the new part she had chosen,—or which, as she herself might have said, had been forced upon her.

When, again alone, she handled the negotiable instrument, some inward emotion was visible upon her features. She

held the slight paper at arm's length, and, with her head a little to one side, showered sparkling rays upon it. In bold, legal hand appeared the words 'one thousand pounds,' and it might well have been that, to such a gaze, some sentimental halo illumined the poor, matter-of-fact specimen of caligraphy. It was a pity at least that the writer could not be a witness to the exhibition, for the legitimate presumption to which Helen's behaviour would have given rise seemed undoubtedly his due. But perhaps the conclusion would have been too much for him, for, when her divine eyes had been sufficiently feasted, Helen deliberately raised Clement's writing to her diviner lips and kissed—the signature. So undoubtedly it seemed, Clement, and let us

hope that the good spirits conveyed the sense of the enravishing conjunction to your soul.

Once again Helen issued from the hotel doorway, and this time sought an establishment of more accredited respectability. With a thousand pounds in her pocket, the young lady felt, and no doubt justifiably, that she could in all seriousness enter upon the new part she had chosen, and make her actual appearance and conduct accord in the world's eye with the select patronymic she had adopted. She had only ten pounds actually available at the moment, it was true, but with a portion of this she could command a little of the more immediately requisite assistance. New gloves, new hat and jacket, dainty shoes, and so on, would tempo-

rarily gloss over some of the most troublesome defects. These things were readily obtainable, and, in the course of an hour or more, Miss Ilderton was again at her hotel.

This time she made request for her account, and whilst it was in preparation she withdrew with alacrity to the drawing-room, and snatched up a paper from a table. It was the paper which had engaged her the previous evening, and in it she at once turned to the advertisement which had last attracted her. A piece of paper drawn from her pocket was placed beside it, and it could readily be seen that Helen was simply comparing a copy of the advertisement previously made with the original. What she read was this :

'The widow of a BARONET, residing in

the family mansion in the country, will receive a young lady as guest. Society of the county. Terms £800 a-year. Apply 28694 B.'

Making very sure of the index number, and of the address of the office of the paper, she threw it aside, and put her own memorandum in her pocket again. She discharged her liabilities, and finally left the hotel.

Within half-an-hour Helen was comfortably established in the corner of a first-class compartment of a London express, with a ticket for King's Cross in her pocket, and the assurance and dignity of the wealthy Miss Ilderton to carry her forward.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARITY.

That result of Mr. Barnard Goldhawke's evening walk was never generally known, for although, in the coolness of retrospect, he daily expected some further development of the incident, no peace-officer ever waited upon him. The journalist kept true to his disinterested resolution, and was content with the privilege of martyrdom.

Barnard himself felt some shame of his

vehement behaviour when the first irritation had subsided; and he found some means of indirectly recompensing the sufferer for the outrage perpetrated upon him. Pildacre did not, it is true, take any extraordinary measures for proving the source of this unexpected benevolence, but, since it seemed like a direct act of approbation on the part of providence in favour of his social endeavours, he accepted it with humility, and prosecuted his ideal with redoubled fervour.

Nor was this the only encouragement which illumined the *Moon* office at this time. Throughout the days that followed there came also some indirect signs of Helen's enigmatical activity. In the first place, Beatrice received a letter (dated with the vaguest liberality from 'London'

only) to say that all went well, and that the writer enclosed ten pounds, which sum the recipient herself would apply in providing 'the necessaries of life' for the household of which she was, for the time being, a member. A week or two later, the journalist himself received a communication, from an altogether different part of the country, but with address, for any practical purposes, quite as indeterminate —by which he was bidden to be of good cheer, to moderate for the present his propagandist zeal, and to apply the enclosed sum of twenty pounds to the more pressing of strictly immediate demands, not less than five pounds of which was to go to the 'long-suffering Jesse.' And so the dark months proceeded.

Highly important as this practical out-

come of Helen's movements was to the journalist and to Beatrice alike, inevitably it served but in the main to pique their curiosity. Pildacre had reached the pass at which twenty pounds of ready money seems a very considerable sum, and consequently he had a not unnatural wish to discover how such a sum was to be acquired in such an inconsiderable period of time. He could but speculate, however; for, as he thought, with her characteristic thoughtlessness, the girl had not even given him an address to which he could send an acknowledgment of the gift.

'What a girl!' exclaimed Nahum to Beatrice, in privacy, stroking his forehead. 'But it is partly inherited. Don't you see, Miss Beatrice, in certain respects—

strong family likeness? You do? Ha, ha! You are a rogue, Miss B., you are a rogue. It is a temperament superior to a grovelling universe, be assured of it.'

The presence of Beatrice in the journalist's household, too, effected considerable improvement in the circumstances of Pildacre's life as much as in those of the life of Beatrice herself. The duties which she eagerly undertook, and even initiated, acted as an invigorating stimulus to what of her womanhood remained with her, just as the spectacle of the journalist's wife served as a constant appalling reminder of what might possibly await herself. Helen had not judged her friend amiss.

Of necessity Beatrice thought much of the inmates of Grove House and of the as-

sociations which the neighbourhood of that place inevitably aroused in her. But, even had there been no promise to Helen, she felt no inducement to a renewed intercourse with that locality. She seldom left the precincts of the *Moon* office, and then always after dark, in the company of the journalist. Nevertheless, it was not possible to escape rumour of what was going on about her,—all the less so seeing the public ethical duties of Mr. Pildacre,—and so news of the Goldhawke family did occasionally reach her.

It was one day after Christmas that Pildacre was discussing with Beatrice a subject which was to form the topic of his principal leader in the issue of the *Moon* that week. The consideration afforded the

young woman thought of a mingled kind, for it once more centred in that august mansion on Warren Common.

'It is an admirable undertaking, Miss Bee,' exclaimed the journalist, with enthusiasm, 'and one which I myself view with especial satisfaction. You will not forget an incident which celebrated the golden day upon which you and I had the happiness to foregather, as our northern bard has it, under one common roof. This excellent undertaking affords me an admirable opportunity of proving an assertion I then made bold to make to you,—to prove, in fact, my supreme disinterestedness in the work which I have been impelled to carry forward. I am wholly unbiassed, save in antagonism to injustice, extortion, or greed.

Fraternity is my sufficient watchword. Liberty I do not view with undivided enthusiasm; whilst Equality seems to me a diabolical delusion: but Fraternity, my dear Miss Bee,—that is the key to the social and every other problem of our planet.'

Beatrice listened, as she always did in such colloquies, with silent and profound respect.

'Your sister must be an admirable woman, my dear,' Pildacre pursued, in some confidence. 'A woman that could regenerate the universe. Do you feel obliged to hold aloof from her? Forgive me if I say that it seems hardly kind in you. Old misfortunes are forgotten. She is yearning to embrace you,—I stake the whole of my sagacity upon it,—pining to

lavish tenderness and luxury upon you,—her only sister, I believe? Yes, a woman of that heart——'

'Don't talk of that, Mr. Pildacre, please,' interposed Beatrice, tremulously. 'I cannot go there yet. I am far, far happier here.'

'Happier—here!' said the journalist, in uncertain voice, viewing the shamefaced girl with tenderest enthusiasm, and planting the palm of his right hand upon his expansive forehead. 'Here, in this—this reeking hovel, amongst—amongst——'

'The kindest and best of people——'

'Beatrice, you unnerve me. Deliberately to elect——'

'Do not talk of it, please, Mr. Pildacre.'

'Miss Crossley, I must speak of it,' cried the man, vehemently. 'It is to be spoken of in words scintillating with——'

And Mr. Pildacre plunged into an enthusiastic eulogy of womanhood in the abstract and concrete, with especial reference to the case under immediate consideration, which kept poor Beatrice in a state of burning uneasiness for five minutes without cessation. Her only refuge lay in diverting the conversation to the one countervailing enthusiasm—Helen, and by this means she found the deliverance she wanted.

The subject from which this conversation had arisen was simply a piece of philanthropic exercise on the part of Miss Gertrude Crossley which had obtained considerable local attention. It really arose out of that sum of one hundred and fifty pounds bequeathed by old Goldhawke to the poor of his parish at the discretion of his judicious niece and housekeeper. The zeal of Miss

Gertrude Crossley in good works was well known amongst the inhabitants of Eastley, Warren Common, and that neighbourhood generally. In the lifetime of her uncle, there had been a kind of open secrecy about her philanthropy, the old squire's testy scruples upon such a score being apparently propitiated by the flimsy fiction offered to him, whilst it is just possible that the warning aggressiveness of his later age acquiesced tacitly in the popular approbation which accrued to his establishment from his niece's clandestine operations.

The recognition which Gertrude's efforts received from the old man's testamentary dispositions had amused Philip. He still lingered about Grove House in facetious indecision, unwilling to forego the amusement which he saw in store for him, and yet un-

able to gather the slightest clue to his brother Barnard's tactics in the matter of the competition. Day by day he became more firmly convinced that his well-rooted inclinations wholly precluded his participation in the quest save in the way of a stimulating decoy to his more phlegmatic and taciturn, but as he well knew consumedly proud and ambitious brother. It was only this reflection that prevented Philip's being the first to broach an amicable settlement of the matter, and, in very truth, it was only an insurmountable abhorrence of a possible misconstruction which prevented Barnard's doing the same. Second only to the latter's contempt for his father's testamentary flippancy, was his resolution to defeat the old cynic's contemplated amusement, in case such immoral sport was permitted

to the departed; but he could not for the life of him hit upon a plan which seemed to quadrate with his fraternal dignity. He had not yet seen the woman who had so much as reconciled him to the thought of matrimony, so that he was wholly free from one aspect of his brother's situation, and to do him justice he was sufficiently resolved to sacrifice no jot of his personal contentment in such a matter for all the wealth of the Indies.

It was in the face of this dilemma that the time passed, and it is difficult to say how much more of the stipulated twelve months might not similarly have slipped by, but for this benefaction of one hundred and fifty pounds to the poor of Eastley. Unpromising as was the item, it at length very effectually cut the knot.

'A hundred and fifty pounds, Dude,' said Philip one day, some time before Christmas, whilst fingering his after-dinner cigar, his good-humoured eyes bent upon the young lady before him. 'What will you do with it? The everlasting coals and blankets?'

'There can be few things more useful to poor people in cold weather.'

'Coals evaporate, certainly; but how about blankets? I was under the impression that they lasted a lifetime. Now, for a given number of years, to my knowledge, you have been dispensing blankets to the poor of a strictly limited area. If all the inhabitants of that area are poor, they must by this time have received several pairs of blankets apiece. Doesn't this conduce to, what might appear to some, dishonesty?

Better give the cash. You can't realize much, I believe, on second-hand blankets, even if they have never been used.'

'Oh, you are dreadful,' exclaimed the young lady, laughing in spite of herself. '*My* poor don't do such things.'

'No, I don't reflect upon them for a moment. I should hardly expect them to be merely human, after these late years of extraordinary manipulation. I have no doubt that they keep especial chests for blankets. But just think of it, Gertrude. I would say nothing in disparagement of blankets, mind: you will understand that. But with this magnificent legacy why not excogitate some really original method of serving them?'

'Unfortunately, I have nothing original about me, Philip.'

'That may be all the better for you, my dear girl. Take somebody else's original idea, then. The air is full of them now-a-days.'

'Turn them all into atheists, for example.'

'Well, hardly. I don't see that they would greatly benefit by that method.'

'I am glad you can see so much, Philip.'

'You would rather have doubted it?' laughed the young gentleman. 'No, I didn't refer to any speculative teaching. Keep to the practical, by all means. But even in that, Gertrude——'

He paused, with his eyes still bent in interest upon her. She, conscious of his gaze, looked down as long as she was able; but at length, as though to check his mis-

chievous intention, Gertrude raised her eyes with assumed composure.

'Even in that——?'

She reddened, and Philip chuckled good humouredly.

'If you are going to tease——'

'No, dear girl, I am not going to tease. Stay, Dude;' and he caught her hand, but instantly flung it away in playfulness. 'Honestly, I am serious. Why not try some modern methods?'

'I don't like modern methods. The old, I am convinced, are better.'

'For an old world, yes; but the world is new now. You would get quite interested, Gertrude, if you would only try what I suggest. It would serve as a tonic to your ethical palate.'

'But you have not suggested anything. Tell me definitely——'

'Oh, I didn't mean absolutely to propound a scheme. How could I, a—well, if I may, it seems to me that you might provide your poor with something outside their own sordid considerations. Humanize them by giving them something rational to think about.'

'I always talk——'

'Precisely,' exclaimed Philip, in good-humoured interruption. 'I wouldn't disparage your talking on any account. I know it to be of the most fascinating description. But in addition even to that, Gertrude. There is that house, now, that old Wilkins used to have. Decent size, good position, rent moderate,—thirty or thirty-five, I suppose. I'll guarantee you

that myself. Why not take it, and rig it up as a kind of women's and children's club? Public nursery for wet days, you know, and so on. Wouldn't something of that sort be an improvement on the unnecessary blankets?'

Gertrude looked up thoughtfully, but with a twinkle of pleasure in her eyes.

'It would do very nicely, but I hardly feel capable of conducting such a place.'

'Rubbish! I'd help you myself to get it going; it will give me something to do. And wouldn't the Reverend Adolphus, that's all, if you only tell him what he has to do!'

'You would, Philip!'

'Even I would, Gertrude. My beneficence astonishes you?'

He was taking up another cigar from

the mantelpiece, so it was only his back that received that special glance of hers. When he looked around she was merely thoughtful.

They discussed the scheme for half an hour ensuing, formulated details of it, and aroused themselves to such a degree of interest in what had originally been the outcome of Philip's banter alone, that it was with difficulty they postponed their visit to the house referred to until the light of the morning.

Thus it was that the undertaking, which, upon its public announcement, had been able to arouse the enthusiasm of an idealist like Pildacre, was initiated. When the place was opened in the new year, the journalist, who was his own reporter as his own everything else, was present in

person to construct his report. A very glowing one he made of it, despite the fact that only the day before he had had judgment in a debtor's case in the county court go against him.

Philip had announced his intention to Gertrude of departing the day before this ceremony, but the young lady had made no secret of her dismay.

'Just one day more, Philip; it is really indispensable,' she said, with more hardihood than she generally displayed in reference to his movements. 'Everybody will be dreadfully disappointed.'

The gentleman shrugged his shoulders, and disclaimed solicitude with reference to public sentiment.

'Of course, I don't mean that. But it will be so very much nicer. Why,

Philip, everything is owing to you!'

'Bah, bah! Don't be ridiculous. But —will you be disappointed, Gertrude?'

'Of course I shall—dreadfully.'

She had made her answer impulsively without having turned in his direction. In an instant she heard his footstep on the carpet, and knew that he was behind her.

'Why will you be disappointed—dreadfully? Tell me now explicitly.'

His action for a moment disconcerted her, but she knew the instant need of composure.

'Isn't it natural?' she exclaimed, turning round to face him.

'Not particularly,' was his mercilessly cool rejoinder.

'You know you have been the heart

and soul of it all. It would have had no beginning without you. Blankets, remember.'

'You wish me to stay, Gertrude?'

'Certainly I do, very much indeed. You will?'

'Of course I will for that—but here——'

Gertrude did not know how it happened. There was a firm hand upon her, and she seemed to be falling backwards, but into the easiest posture of repose. She was powerless, and for a moment his lips were planted upon her own.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW LEAVES.

As already mentioned, through the services of the *Aggthorpe Moon* and other more influential representatives of the provincial press, the little Eastley Institute had been widely noised abroad. Many ladies of philanthropic tendencies in various parts of the country communicated with the originators of the scheme with a view to eliciting details of organisation, and so on, for adoption in their own local-

ities, and in the weeks succeeding the opening many even made a pilgrimage to Warren Common to personally inspect the premises in working order. Seeing that these visitors were almost exclusively ladies of the most unimpeachable social pretensions, the result afforded undisguised gratification to one or two of the inmates of Grove House, who naturally occupied a prominent position in the connection.

None of these incidents, however, had afforded such plenitude of satisfaction as a note one day received from an aristocratic neighbour in the country, not far from Aggthorpe: to wit, Mrs. Collingwood Milverton, of Croftwick Hall. Miss Crossley had, under some possible circumstances, 'met' this lady, although of course on no general terms of social

equality with her. Indeed, owing to the peculiar temperament and reputation of the deceased Goldhawke, the social intercourse of the younger generation had never been of such order as under other circumstances their wealth would undoubtedly have commanded. This explained much of the undisguised enthusiasm with which the condescension of the great lady had been received at Grove House. Mrs. Milverton had, in fact, trusted that Miss Crossley would permit her to bring, on some convenient day, two ladies, her friends, to inspect 'your admirable institution at Eastley,'—ladies, it was mentioned, who had been drawn hither from some distance by the widespread reputation of Miss Crossley's philanthropic enterprise.

It chanced that Philip was absent when this exhilarating missive came to Grove House, but a communication quickly brought him down to Aggthorpe. He approved of Gertrude's acknowledgment of the application, in which she had made reference to Mrs. Milverton's kind inquiry, expressed what happiness it would give her to show that lady and any of her friends the very little she was doing, and hoped, in conclusion, that it might be convenient for Mrs. Milverton and her friends to partake of luncheon at Grove House on the occasion of their visit to Eastley.

The modesty and general fitness of the response gave satisfaction to the ladies at Croftwick Hall, and upon the day appointed, the party set forth with kindly

feelings towards the oddly-situated young housekeeper on Warren Common. It appeared that Mrs. Milverton's visitors knew nothing of the Goldhawke family, had not even heard of the notorious will of the old capitalist, so that their hostess had had to acquaint them with such outlines of the family history as were known to herself. It had naturally aroused considerable interest in the hearers, and they went to the interview with an addition to their merely philanthropic emotions.

'But I understand that the younger generation is quite free from this taint of vulgarity,' Mrs. Milverton had concluded, 'and I am glad to hear that that ridiculous, and indeed indelicate will, is to be ignored by the two brothers. It seems that they have too much sense

to submit to such a degrading competition.'

'I should think so indeed,' assented the elder of the ladies addressed.

Mrs. Milverton did but emphasize the common impression; although, as we know indeed, the two brothers whom the singular will affected had not as yet come to such explicit understanding, however wishful both might be for the consummation. They were undoubtedly now nearer to it than at any moment previously, for when Philip came down in response to Gertrude's information, he had resolved definitely to engage himself to his fair cousin, and therewith to openly abandon the ignoble competition which the will had instituted. Singularly enough, Barnard had, under different circumstances, at

length been able to confront the inevitable, and had resolved to avail himself of this meeting with his brother to come to some definite arrangement. So he had at least before the personal interview with Philip; but, as soon as they encountered, he decided to put it off until the following day.

Gertrude held but little intercourse with Barnard, hence with characteristic reticence she had not mentioned to him the great lady's condescension. At the dinner-table, however, on the evening before the eventful day, she disclosed it.

'Mrs. Milverton from Croftwick, and some friends of hers, are going to have luncheon here to-morrow, Barnard. Would you care to meet them?'

'Mrs. Milverton!'

Gertrude explained to him.

'Certainly; I shall make a point of being here to meet them.'

The ready response perhaps surprised the two others, for they had no glimmering of an understanding of Barnard. By them he was always thought to share his father's temperament in matters social. If, in reality, this had ever to any extent been the case, it was not now in the least degree applicable, for Barnard was making a positive study of the sociable qualities. It seemed as though that contempt which his father's will had inspired in him was extending to much else in which the old man had been implicated. Barnard had not, of course, betrayed to his two unsympathetic companions all the pleasure

that their announcement had given him. Philip interposed some appropriate comment, and all three discussed the matter in harmony.

The following day broke favourably, and throughout the morning the yellow sun, from a brown, wintry haze, celebrated the approach of the visitors. Barnard seemed in good spirits at the breakfast-table, having, in fact, resolved once again to get through that nauseating business with Philip. He had to go into the town for an hour or two, but, before going, he said to his brother,

'You won't leave before the evening?'

'Oh, no; not for a day or two probably,' replied Philip, and mused.

'I want to talk to you to-night.'

'Very good.'

Gertrude glanced frequently from the window during the morning, in nervous expectation of the arrival. Philip was naturally the calmest member of the household, and the obvious perturbation of his cousin amused him. Peeping into the drawing-room upon one occasion, having seen Gertrude creep in there a few minutes previously, he found her with her back towards him at the window. He left his slippers in the doorway, and stole up to her.

'Are their majesties in——'

'Oh, Philip!' cried Gertrude, and they laughed.

'It is really like a royal family affair, Dude. Hadn't we better stand bare-headed at the gateway?'

'Well, you know, I am not accustomed

to such people. It is all very well for you——'

'You will outshine them all, Gertrude,' he said, scanning her affectionately; and her scrupulous preparations had made her an object to be looked upon. 'Be yourself, old girl, and I assure you they will all fall in love with you.'

She turned her face away before his fixed gaze, mindful of a recent incident; but at another glance towards the window they both took to flight.

At the preliminary meeting, Barnard did not appear. It was arranged that Philip and Gertrude should conduct the party to their famous institute, and all return to luncheon. Philip, too, had faithfully promised his cousin to be with her in the drawing-room as a support in the

first encounter; but, as he had been surprised without his shoes, this part of the compact could not be strictly adhered to. Gertrude was alone when the ladies were shown in to her, but no Philip could have helped her to additional gracefulness.

After a kindly greeting on the part of Mrs. Milverton, 'my two friends, Lady Ivelet and Miss Ilderton,' were duly introduced to the young hostess, and when Philip, in a few minutes, entered, the conversation was proceeding graciously.

That the visitors were of some social distinction it was not difficult to perceive. Lady Ivelet, whom Philip had appropriated, was a dignified lady of comely middle-age. She had a little mole on her right cheek, a complexion fresh and without wrinkle, and silver hair; in dress

unostentatiously tasteful. She regarded Philip benignly, and more so as his conversation proceeded. Oh, how poor Gertrude envied her complacent cousin!

'Lady Ivelet,' she heard him saying, easily, 'you are, I believe, a neighbour of Colonel Saltway, at the Pines?'

'Certainly,' was the vivacious rejoinder. 'And you, Mr. Goldhawke, are a friend of the colonel's?'

'Well, no. I may not claim that honour; but he has a nephew Charles, who is a friend of mine. We were together at Oxford, and in the Temple——'

'Oh, yes. Mr. Saltway has mentioned—'

Mrs. Milverton, and the young lady introduced as Miss Ilderton, devoted themselves to Gertrude. The latter of

the visitors had attracted Miss Crossley's immediate attention, for she was young, obviously no older than herself, but of a most impressive beauty. She naturally took only a side-place in the conversation, but from that her well-bred graciousness and affability were sufficiently obvious. If Gertrude felt any uneasiness in the interview, now that the original shock was over, it must have been from the ease and beauty of this rival that she drew it. Situated as she was, the young lady would scarcely have been human had she not been compelled to cast a glance occasionally upon her cousin Philip, to learn the direction of his eyes. However, she managed herself as well as she could, and all seemed to go with perfect smoothness and propriety.

It was but a short distance to what Philip called the Reformatory, so the ladies wished to walk. Lady Ivelet, being apparently the person for whom the expedition had been undertaken, was naturally engrossed in philanthropic details, and she took possession of Gertrude on the road. Philip accompanied the two other ladies at a short distance behind. The locality was as much rural as the proximity of a prosperous manufacturing town would admit of, and, so far as natural objects were visible through a covering of coal-dust and other deposited carbon, they undoubtedly inclined to be picturesque. There was a shaded lane, with blighted trees over-arching; a blackened church-tower peeping at one point through the branches, with a cluster of ivy about it;

meadows sloping down to a row of willow-trees, with a sluggish, turbid river and a railway-embankment below.

'You will find this a contrast to Ivelet, I fear, Miss Ilderton,' remarked Philip, smiling, as they went along.

'Shocking, Mr. Goldhawke. Mrs. Milverton has already had too much of my opinion upon that topic, so I must not say what I am tempted to. But at least,' she added, briskly, 'how different it would all be if there was any general effort like yours here to counteract the evil influences.'

'But you don't approve of the English abandonment to introspection,' interposed Mrs. Milverton.

'Is this the outcome of it?'

'Mr. Goldhawke will not misunderstand

me if I say, certainly it is. People used to be content, I think, with doing what they liked without questionings or counteracting.'

'I suppose they did,' laughed Philip. 'But I am afraid we are now born questioning and counteracting. Would you wish it altered, Miss Ilderton?'

'I have hardly made up my mind about it. I think we have all caught a little of the philanthropic infection.'

'You connect philanthropy with our malady, then?'

'Certainly I do. It is one of the principal symptoms; because I suppose it is one of the most obvious outlets for the superfluous energy prompted by a restless conscience.'

Philip became interested. This was

not his every-day kind of conversation.

'But the altered conditions of life naturally incite to philanthropy, do they not?'

'Undoubtedly they do, but we practise it without there being direct material incitement. I was talking to Colonel Saltway a few days ago about this, and he, you know, thinks it an unmitigated evil. He prides himself on being old-fashioned. He would not hear of the application of what he calls urban methods to a rural community. I had said that in England your obviously neglected part was the country.'

'You are a valuable supporter of the radical programme, Miss Ilderton,' interposed the lady listener.

'Am I? I wasn't aware of it. I don't

see how an obvious programme can be the property of a political party. In fact, I think such parties ought to be strictly kept out of it. Social combinations are what you really require; like this of yours in fact, Mr. Goldhawke,' said Miss Ilderton, as they approached the house which was their destination, and at the gate of which Gertrude and her companion were awaiting the others.

An enthusiastic hour was spent at the Reformatory in examination of every detail of its management. By the direction of Lady Ivelet, Miss Ilderton took copious notes of what she saw there, in her little scented pocket-diary, and questioned largely.

Nevertheless, it was an anxious hour for Gertrude. The fascination exercised

by the younger visitor over Philip was obvious enough to the keen eyes of his cousin, and, from having been enravishingly fair and charming, the innocent Miss Ilderton had become the incarnation of every species of enormity. Gertrude had jumped to the conclusion that this was the kind of girl that of all others she held in utter abhorrence; and, as a concatenation, she considered that Philip ought to have the same feeling as herself, and—show it; or at least refrain from such an exasperating display of complaisance in her very presence.

To aggravate matters, on the return journey Miss Ilderton took possession of Gertrude as a companion, whilst the other three came on behind. Now, despite the apparent community of philanthropic in-

terest, to say nothing of such obvious affability and condescension on the part of the visitor, the conversation between the two young ladies proceeded with some want of spontaneity. That such should be the case with Gertrude was only natural, but with Miss Ilderton? Subtle enough are the psychical influences and communications, so we are now taught. Was it possible, therefore, that more of Gertrude's antipathy than she herself could have suspected was but the reciprocation of occult sensations strongly enough existent, with whatever force repressed, in her brilliant companion? Did Miss Ilderton behold, through this refined and tender philanthropist, a sister hungering amidst the most sordid circumstances? Did she hear, ringing through

her melodramatic instincts, the words 'Pledge,' 'A Home,' and ten thousand pounds of legacy? It is not impossible, surely; for, whatever the power we may wield over our external, sartorial aspect, the emotions of the mind are not so entirely under our command. What a contrast this seemed to the poor, defeated Beatrice! If, at times, Miss Ilderton's teeth did actually encounter, her behaviour was heroic. She was geniality incarnate. And everything was so delightful. The sympathetic knowledge displayed; the enthusiasm in the cause of sisters.

'For are not all women our sisters?' asked Miss Ilderton, emphatically, 'as much as, or even more than, those who have an actual title to the epithet.'

An innocent enough remark under some circumstances, but one which, nevertheless, at the present moment was hardly opportune, and which made Gertrude almost start, and quite scan her companion's features uneasily. But unruffled, innocent enthusiasm alone was apparent there. Gertrude's irrevocable repugnance was confirmed, however.

In the meantime, Mr. Barnard Goldhawke had been making somewhat scrupulous preparations for his reception of the ladies; and, when he considered his toilet completed, he had taken up a safe position at a window with his opera-glasses. Thus it came that he had been considerably impressed by the mien and appearance of one at least of the

visitors before actually encountering them.

In the course of the luncheon, Philip and Gertrude awakened to the fact that Barnard was conversing with positive distinction. It chanced that he had the opportunity of addressing the greater share of his remarks to the fascinating Miss Ilderton, and her sympathetic reception of his conversation seemed to stimulate his powers to a degree hitherto unsuspected. So unexpected and startling was this revelation of an unknown element in the gentleman, that the other two were in a great measure disconcerted by it, and cut but very poor figures in comparison. Barnard was himself as surprised as any of them. Never had he known himself to possess such fluency of speech and such versatility of intellect, and he con-

sciously rejoiced in the accomplishments. Barnard was in fact, unknown even to himself, at that moment confronting a new world—a world of which he had hitherto never suspected the existence. His soul had, upon some unaccountable impulse, got a glimpse beyond the paralyzing medium of commercial speculation and aggrandisement, and sundry of his human faculties had consequently for the first time found a possible field of action. This, doubtless, was all the explanation of the notable change in him. Moreover, not possessing the veneer of a social education, there was a more obvious ring of sincerity about whatever he felt called upon to say, than there was in his brother's more polished and orthodox commonplaces, for instance. And, in

such company, this by no means was without its effect.

With the introduction of this new and unlooked-for element, as well as of the tastefully-proportioned luncheon provided, the ladies felt their visit to be very agreeably completed. As they drove homewards, they were loud in the praises of one at least of the households which those of their condition are apt to regard somewhat superciliously, and one which, moreover, certain of them had hitherto regarded with positive contempt. Miss Ilderton, for her part,—who had throughout been so singularly frank and affable—was noticeably reserved, but this, too, was speedily altered, and she took her proper part in the enthusiasm.

When Philip and Gertrude were alone,

they could talk of nothing but the development of Barnard. It seemed to have bred some measure of discontent in them, as though he had trespassed on their domains. They were at the height of their discussion when Barnard himself entered to their company. Something appeared to betray to him the situation, and a ripple of impatience crossed his features.

'I only came to say, Gertrude,' he remarked, calmly, 'that I shall be away for a few days.'

And he turned on his heel.

'You don't want to see me?' said Philip.

'Oh, never mind. It will do some other time.'

Barnard's errand had been for some-

thing very different, but circumstances had once more repressed him.

'In love with her to a certainty,' laughed Philip, a minute or two later. 'Nor can I exactly wonder. Certainly she is the most fascinating woman that it has been my lot to encounter. So cultivated, emancipated——'

But Gertrude left him to his enthusiastic reflections. Strangely enough, that day Philip also took his departure.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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